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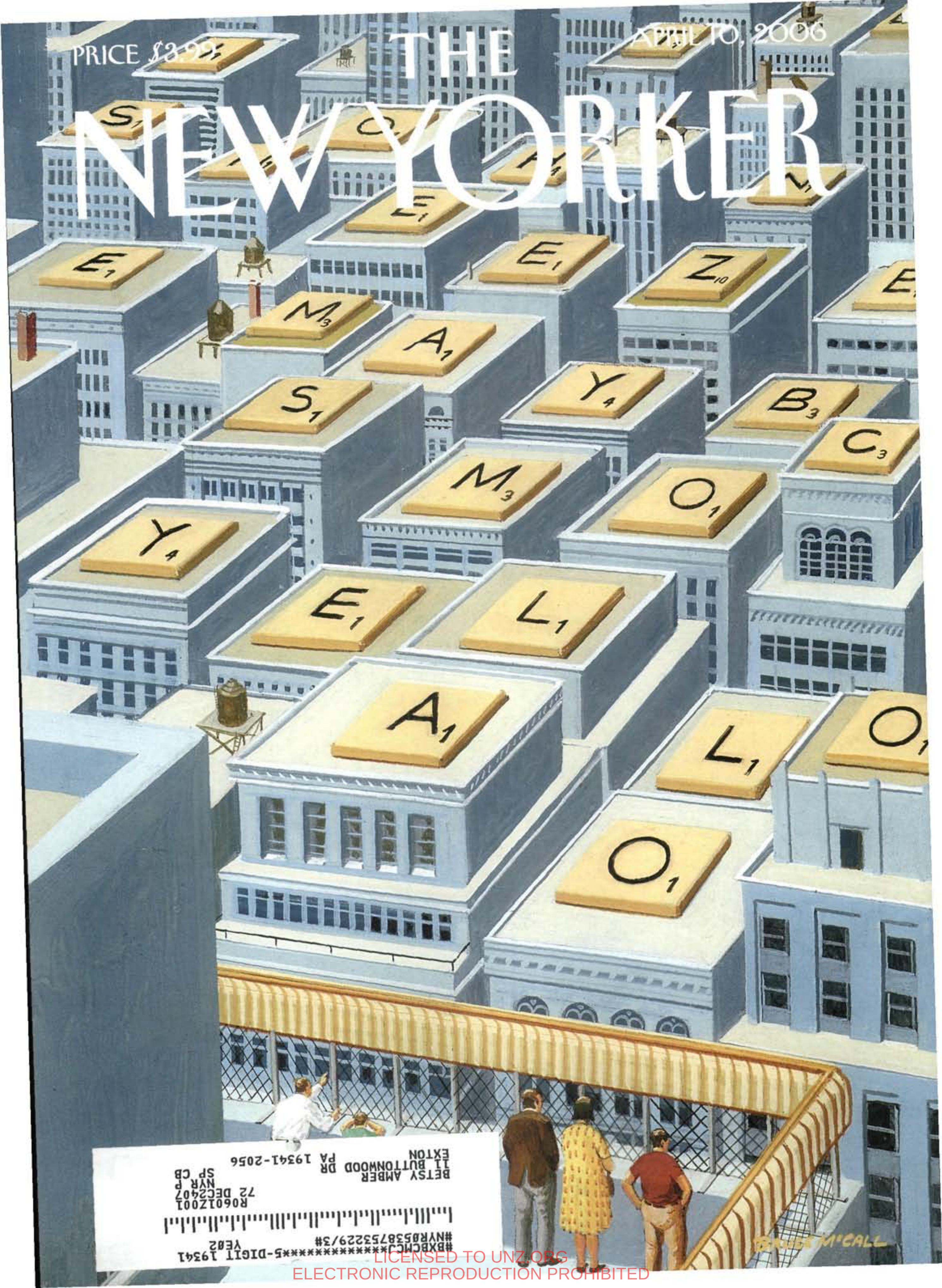
APRIL 10, 2006



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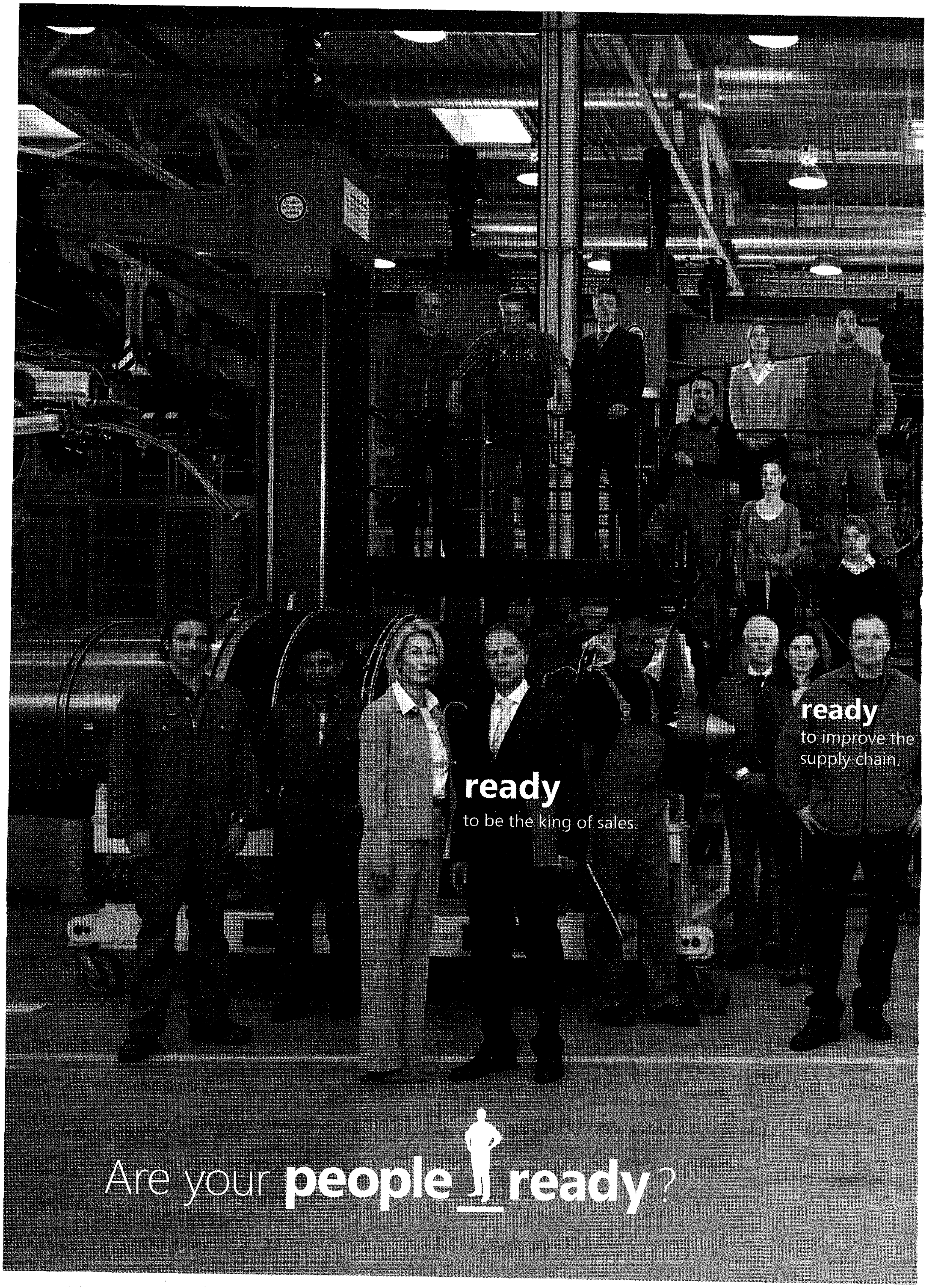
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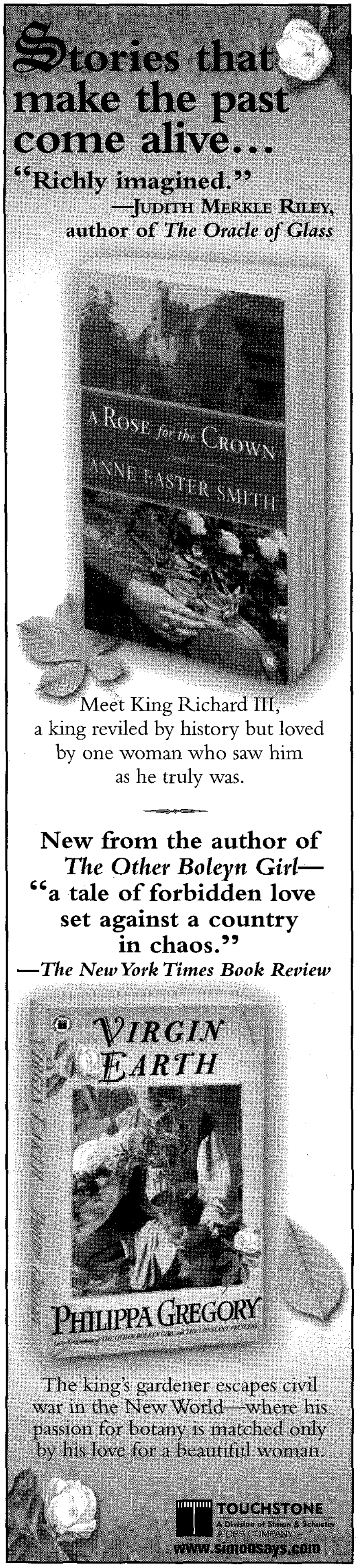
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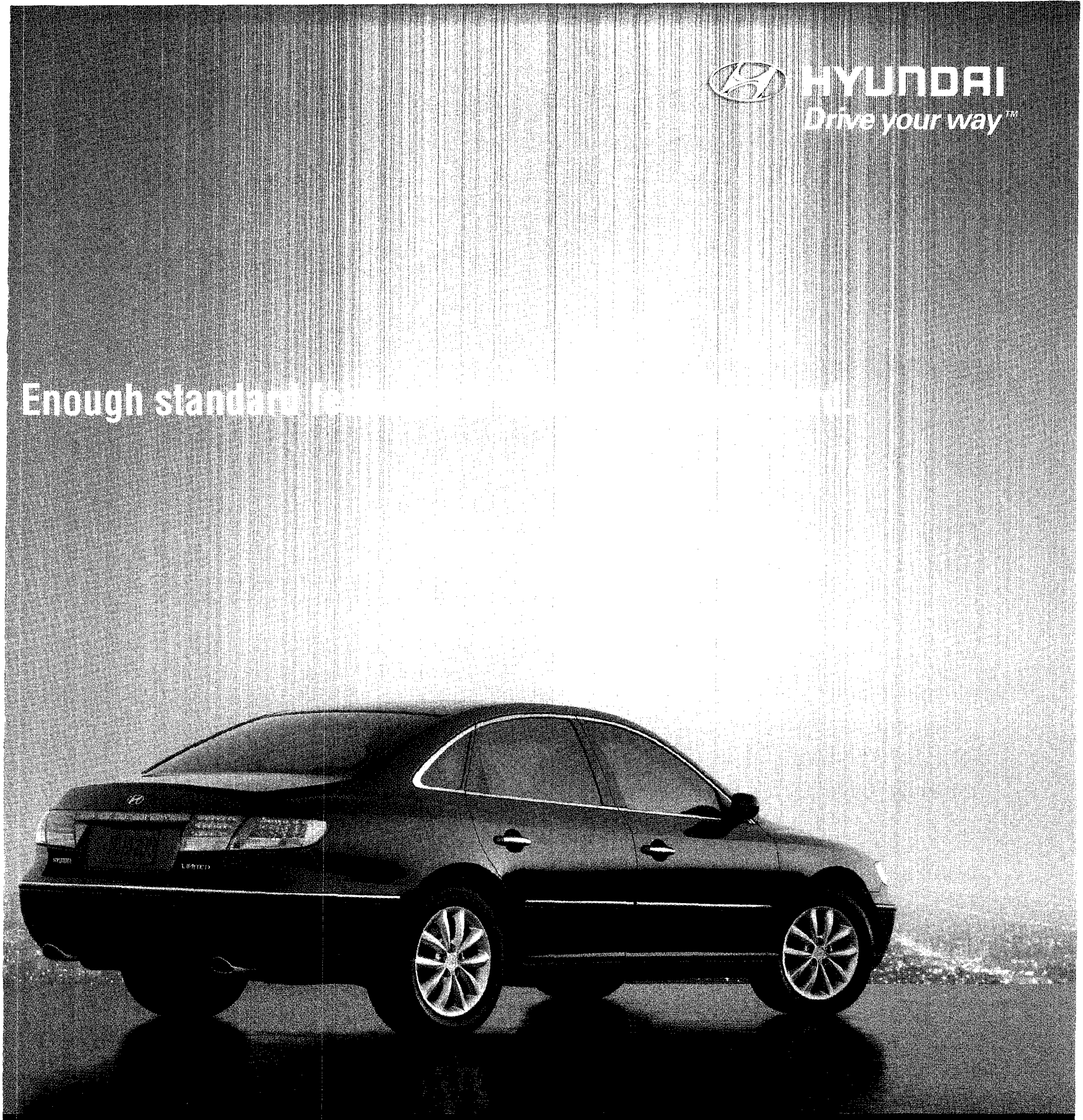

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THIS WEEK'S
WEB EXCLUSIVE:

George Packer discusses what American generals have learned about the insurgency in Iraq, with an expanded portfolio of photographs by Samantha Appleton.

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CONTRIBUTORS

George Packer ("The Lesson of Tal Afar," p. 48) has reported regularly on Iraq. His book "The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq" was published in October.

John Cassidy (Comment, p. 25) is a staff writer.

David Owen (The Talk of the Town, p. 27; "The Soundtrack of Your Life," p. 66) has a new book, "Sheetrock & Shellac: A Thinking Person's Guide to the Art and Science of Home Improvement," coming out in June.

George Saunders (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 40) is the author of "The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil."

David Sedaris ("The Understudy," p. 42) has contributed to the magazine since 1995.

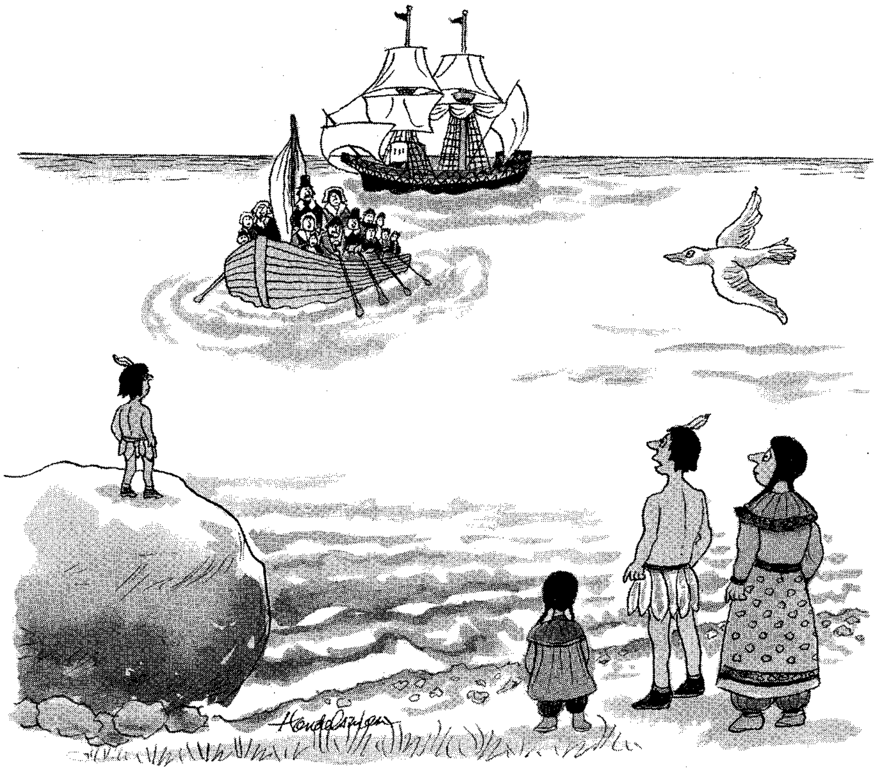
Bill Buford ("On the Bay," p. 34) is the author of "Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany," which will be published in June.

Meghan O'Rourke (Poem, p. 62) is the culture editor of *Slate* and a poetry editor at *The Paris Review*.

Steven Millhauser (Fiction, p. 72) is the author of three collections of stories, including "The Knife Thrower."

Malcolm Gladwell (Books, p. 80) has published two books, "The Tipping Point" and "Blink."

John Updike (Books, p. 83) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. His new novel, "Terrorist," comes out in June. ♦



"Well, they look pretty undocumented to me."

THE MAIL

MR. SHAWN AND MS. LEE

Of the screenwriter's many inventions for the film "Capote," his concept of William Shawn's activities during the creation of "In Cold Blood" is weirdly off, as Allen and Wallace Shawn note (The Mail, April 3rd). While his imagination produced a personality unrecognizable to me, I can contribute two small facts about Mr. Shawn's professional involvement: the film has me talk to Mr. Shawn on the telephone—I didn't. And, at any time Truman Capote was in Kansas, Mr. Shawn wasn't.

Harper Lee
Monroeville, Ala.

SCIENTIFIC AMERICA

Michael Specter's piece regarding the Bush Administration's war on the laboratory affirms what many academicians have been asserting since the 2000 election ("Political Science," March 13th). In addition, federal funding of the academic research engine has created situations where entire regions are dependent on the economic vitality of research universities. In 1940, shortly before large-scale federal research funding began, United States Steel was the largest employer in Alabama, and the economic future of the region was predicated on the continued growth of the domestic steel industry; today, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where I work, is the largest employer in the state and the economic bedrock of the central region. Any significant reduction in research-funding levels may ultimately devastate those sections of the country for which scientific research has become an economic issue as much as an academic one.

Terry Gunnell
Birmingham, Ala.

Specter's article should serve as a wake-up call for health-care providers, who often believe that the quality of their work alone can demonstrate their commitment to universal health care and tolerance. Those of us who work in "controversial" fields, such as reproductive health or H.I.V., feel that we are making a political statement simply by showing up for work. Clearly, however, this is not enough when faced with politicians who would let women die of cervical cancer rather than vaccinate young girls.

Shannon Huffaker, Nurse Practitioner
San Francisco Department of Public Health, AIDS Office
San Francisco, Calif.

Leslee J. Unruh, the president of the Abstinence Clearinghouse, seems to forget that the human papillomavirus does not depend solely on a woman's monogamy but on her partner's as well. By working against the use of the new HPV vaccine in preadolescent girls, the "abstinence only" crowd might condemn some of its own chaste daughters to a death caused, perhaps, by a one-time dalliance on the part of an otherwise faithful husband.

Cathie Cook
Roanoke, Va.

In giving an example of groups who misuse or take advantage of complex data, Specter states that the fact that no one has died from consuming genetically engineered food has not prevented leading environmentalists from working to ban them. These two statements, though true, are completely unrelated: environmentalists and ecologists work to ban these products because of the potentially immense ecological risk of releasing innumerable mutant organisms into the global gene pool. Whether they represent a health risk is for the medical profession to decide.

Lisa Atwell
Truckee, Calif.

•

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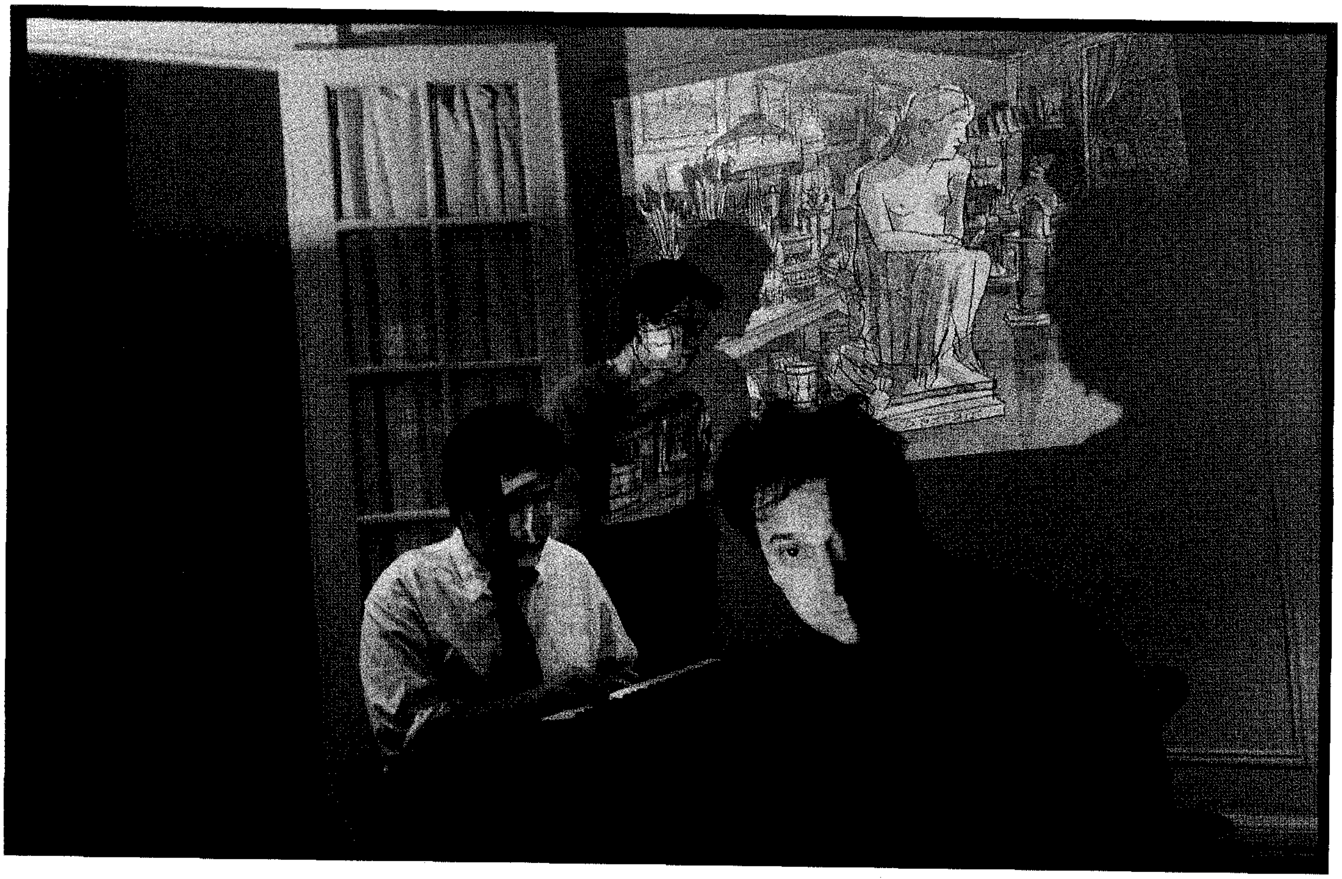

Ben Katchor and Mark Mulcahy's multimedia work "The Rosenbach Company." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
WILSON'S WORLD

The avant-garde stalwart Robert Wilson directs a four-hour version of "Peer Gynt," Henrik Ibsen's classic drama from 1867, in a Norwegian production at BAM. With music by the composer and violinist Michael Galasso. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CLOSE TO THE HEAT

The Peru native Eva Ayllón, perhaps the world's premier interpreter of Afro-Peruvian music, leaves no doubt about the high-spirited potential of her country's songs. She is a vocal superstar who has released some twenty albums and who sells out stadiums at home. Ayllón is less well known in the States; the World Music Institute brings her to the relatively intimate confines of Town Hall this week. (See page 10.)

ART
ICE CAPADES

Visitors to the Whitney Biennial who were smitten with Pierre Huyghe's dreamy, ambiguous film about Antarctica, "A Journey That Wasn't," can also drop by the Marian Goodman gallery to see his marionette film, "This Is Not a Time for Dreaming," from 2004. (See page 12.)

MOVIES
FAR BEYOND GEISHAS

None of the twelve movies in the Japan Society's upcoming series "Against the Tide" have been distributed here, and they display a wide range of themes and styles. "Kazahana," directed by Shinji Somai, is a heartbreaking portrayal of urban solitude; and "Down the Drain" is a grim comedy about a serious-minded teen-age girl whose life unravels in a series of mounting misfortunes after she's caught using a friend's train pass. (See page 21.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
OUTSIDE THE BOX

As a prelude to Christie's upcoming sale of postwar and contemporary art, the house has put a selection of sculptures by Donald Judd—the largest offering since the Whitney's Judd retrospective in 1988—on public view at Rockefeller Center. (See page 22.)

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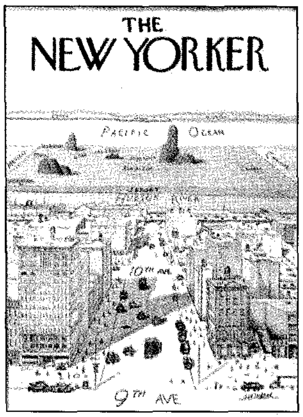

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AWAKE AND SING!
Clifford Odets's 1935 drama focusses on a Jewish family in the Bronx during the Depression. Starring Lauren Ambrose, Ben Gazzara, Mark Ruffalo, and Zoë Wanamaker. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

BASED ON A TOTALLY TRUE STORY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, about a young comic-book writer on the verge of fame. In previews. Opens April 11. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

LOS BIG NAMES
Marga Gomez stars in a one-woman show about her Latin family's show-business adventures in New York in the sixties and in Hollywood in the nineties. In previews. Opens April 9. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE DROWSY CHAPERONE
A new meta-musical, about a theatre fan in a reverie over his favorite musical, starring Bob Martin and Sutton Foster. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

FESTEN
The American première of a play by David Eldridge, adapted from the 1998 Dogme film "The Celebration," starring Larry Bryggman, Jeremy Sisto, Michael Hayden, Ali MacGraw, and Julianna Margulies. In previews. Opens April 9. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

GUARDIANS
This play by Peter Morris, about scandals of the Iraq war, stars Katherine Moennig ("The L Word") and Lee Pace. In previews. Opens April 11. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

A JEW GROWS IN BROOKLYN
An autobiographical musical comedy about the family of the playwright Jake Ehrenreich (who also stars). In previews. Opens April 10. (American Theatre of Actors, 314 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)

LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY
Signature Theatre Company presents a play by John Guare, set in nineteen-seventies Greenwich Village, starring Lili Taylor and Sherie Rene Scott. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

LESTAT
The new musical based on Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles" features music by Elton John and lyrics by Bernie Taupin. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

LITTLE WILLY
A multimedia play about Adolph Hitler's nephew, the playboy and car salesman William Patrick Hitler. Previews begin April 6. Opens April 10. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-279-4200.)

ON THE LINE
Mike Nichols produced a new play by Joe Roland, about three lifelong friends who clash when a strike disrupts their factory jobs, at the newly renovated Cherry Lane Theatre. In previews. Opens April 11. (38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

PEER GYNT
A National Theatre of Bergen and Norwegian Theatre of Oslo co-production of Henrik Ibsen's play, about the follies of a farmer's arrogant son. Robert Wilson directs. In Norwegian with English supertitles. April 11-16. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

SANDRA BERNHARD: EVERYTHING BAD AND BEAUTIFUL
The audacious comedian has a new show. Opens April 5. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

SHOW PEOPLE
A new play by Paul Weitz, about two Broadway actors who haven't acted in years. Directed by Peter Askin. In previews. Opens April 6. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STUFF HAPPENS
David Hare's drama about the Iraq war has its New York première at the Public. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

TARZAN
Disney's version of Edgar Rice Burroughs's classic story comes to Broadway. With a book by David Henry Hwang and music by Phil Collins. Bob Crowley directs. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

THREE DAYS OF RAIN
Julia Roberts, Paul Rudd, and Bradley Cooper star in a revival of Richard Greenberg's drama about siblings who unearth secrets about their late father. In previews. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE THREEPENNY OPERA
The Roundabout Theatre Company presents the operetta by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, adapted by Wallace Shawn. Starring Alan Cumming, Cyndi Lauper, and Nellie McKay. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

TRYST
In Karoline Leach's romantic thriller, set in Edwardian England, a con man focusses his attentions on a shopgirl. In previews. Opens April 6. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WEDDING SINGER
A musical based on the 1998 movie, about a wedding singer who falls in love with a bride-to-be in New Jersey in the eighties. John Rando directs. In previews. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE CATARACT
The Women's Project presents Lisa D'Amour's play about a Midwestern couple who take in a pair of Southerners. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

FRAGMENT
The scene is familiar: a clutter of nearly empty wine cups and cheese cubes arrayed on tables. The actor Juliana Francis speaks first, saying, "Great rage and stupidity have destroyed many mortals." Her interlocutors are rueful: Tony Torn plays a Falstaffian spirit trapped in a shoe salesman's body, and Zachary Oberzan is his sometime rival. The three actors give sharp-witted performances, suggesting post-9/11 anomie while they're delivering lines from the lost plays of Sophocles and Euripides (Kelly Cooper assembled extant fragments into a textual collage). Director Pavol Liska expends a good deal of ingenuity on staging this odd verbal contrivance, but despite every effort the play lacks momentum. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Through April 9.)

THE GOD COMMITTEE
In Mark St. Germain's new play, three heart-transplant candidates vie for the same heart. Kevin Moriarty directs. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

HELL
A new opera by Michael Webster and Eileen Myles examines the post-9/11 media culture. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101. Through April 9.)

JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS
When this revue first appeared Off Broadway, in 1968, it helped spur a lasting Anglophone interest in the Belgian troubadour, in large part because of Eric Blau and Mort Shuman's skillful translation of Brel's lyrics into English, which managed to retain their Gallic melancholy and salty romanticism. Now Gordon Greenberg ("The Baker's Wife") directs a welcome revival with a uniformly strong cast of four. In staging Brel's songs, Greenberg wisely avoids slipping into Euro-chintz; instead, he creates the ambience of a gritty Parisian alley at dusk—a place where remembrances of past loves, bitter contemplations of mortality, and boozy revelry all have their proper home. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

MEN OF CLAY
A new drama written and directed by Jeff Cohen, about four middle-aged Jewish tennis buffs trying to find their place in Baltimore in the seventies. (June Havoc, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

MERCY ON THE DOORSTEP
A Deadhead's boozy widow, Corrine (the pricelessly acid Laura Esterman), finds her alcoholic fog dispelled when her born-again stepdaughter, Rena (Jenn Harris), and Rena's husband, Mark (Mark Rosenthal), a pastor intent on saving souls, arrive to take over her house. It seems that Corrine's late husband—who made his livelihood selling comic books, bongs, and porn—had a deathbed conversion and changed his will, leaving everything to his daughter and her holier-than-thou husband. When all three attempt to share the house, Corrine fights tooth and nail against Mark's lessons on salvation, and the situation grows tedious for all concerned. The playwright, Gip Hoppe, never succeeds in making Mark more than a cliché, but wayward Corrine is an endearing, maddening individual. Jim Simpson directs. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

PEN
Playwrights Horizons presents the world première of a new play by David Marshall Grant. (Reviewed in this issue.) (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS GARLAND
Imagined here in a dressing room in Copenhagen, moments before the final concert of her brief, dysfunctional life, a hard-bitten Judy Garland (Adrienne Barbeau) admits her hunger for the adulation—and pity—of her public. When she isn't demanding mashed potatoes from a hapless gofer (Kerby Joe Grubb), she seems content to meander from one anecdote to the next, dishing on her contemporaries and baring emotional wounds. (Garland's demons, most prominently her domineering mother and the M-G-M czar Louis B. Mayer, sometimes materialize as prerecorded voices, to tacky effect.) As a confessional rant, Billy Van Zandt's script feels adrift and almost arbitrary, and Barbeau (from "Maude") clicks her heels but never quite grounds them. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

A SAFE HARBOR FOR ELIZABETH BISHOP
A new play by Marta Góes, with Amy Irving in the title role. (Reviewed in this issue.) (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL
A musical based on the Newbery Medal-winning book by Patricia MacLachlan, about a woman who enters a family's lonely life on the prairie. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SHILOH RULES
The New York première of a satire about Civil War reënactment, written by Doris Baizley and directed by Michaela Goldhaber. (Gene Frankel, 24 Bond St. 212-868-4444. Through April 9.)

33 TO NOTHING
A rock band struggles to stay together in Grant James Varjas's play, premièring at the Bottle Factory Theatre. (195 E. 3rd St. 212-868-4444.)

TRIAL BY WATER
Qui Nguyen's "Trial by Water" is really a trial by language. It clumsily imagines two tempest-tossed young boat people—Vietnamese brothers—forced to leave their family and sail, against their wishes, into the unknown. Their boat gets lost at sea, and the younger brother is eaten by a predatory refugee. The predator gets his comeuppance: the older brother eats him alive. For the refugees who survived the journey (the play is a fictionalized version of a true event) and for the audience members who see it enacted, the experience is beyond words; the word "dire," however, comes to mind. (45 Below, 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

WELL
Lisa Kron's comedy, which makes its Broadway début after a successful run at the Public in 2004, explores the conventional wisdom of wellness. Leigh Silverman directs. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

ABIGAIL'S PARTY: Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through April 8. **BACK OF THE THROAT:** Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. **CYCLONE:** Studio Dante, 257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. Through April 8. **ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **FAMILY SECRETS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **GEORGE M. COHAN TONIGHT!:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **GREY GARDENS:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200. Through April 9. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **LIVING ROOM IN AFRICA:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE MUSIC TEACHER:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. Through April 9. **THE PAJAMA GAME:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **RED LIGHT WINTER:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

TABLES FOR TWO
COUNTRY

90 Madison Ave., at 29th St. (212-889-7100)—This new restaurant in the Carlton Hotel makes the most of its split personality. Downstairs there's the convivial café; a staircase at one end leads upstairs, where a Tiffany-style glass dome, resembling a grape arbor, is the focal point of an elegant dining room. Presided over by the chef and owner, Geoffrey Zakarian (his other restaurant is Town), with the help of the executive chef, Doug Psaltis, the busy kitchen manages to provide consistently enjoyable but perfectly distinct experiences.

Downstairs draws in noisy groups of young professionals. Some of its attempts at hipness, like the bottles on each table labelled "iloveoliveoil," feel strained, but the dark wood and the leather seats exude an upscale cool that's borne out in the menu. On a recent evening, thick and frothy tomato fondue, spiked with pine nuts, amplified the fine flavor of an "artisanal" pasta, while the gnocchi layered with cheddar cheese, pancetta, and broccoli was an innovative twist on mac and cheese. There were a few out-of-place flourishes: a waiter presented a bottle of balsamic vinegar and delivered an exposition on its "twenty-year aging process" before pouring a thin stream over an unexceptional appetizer of artichokes.

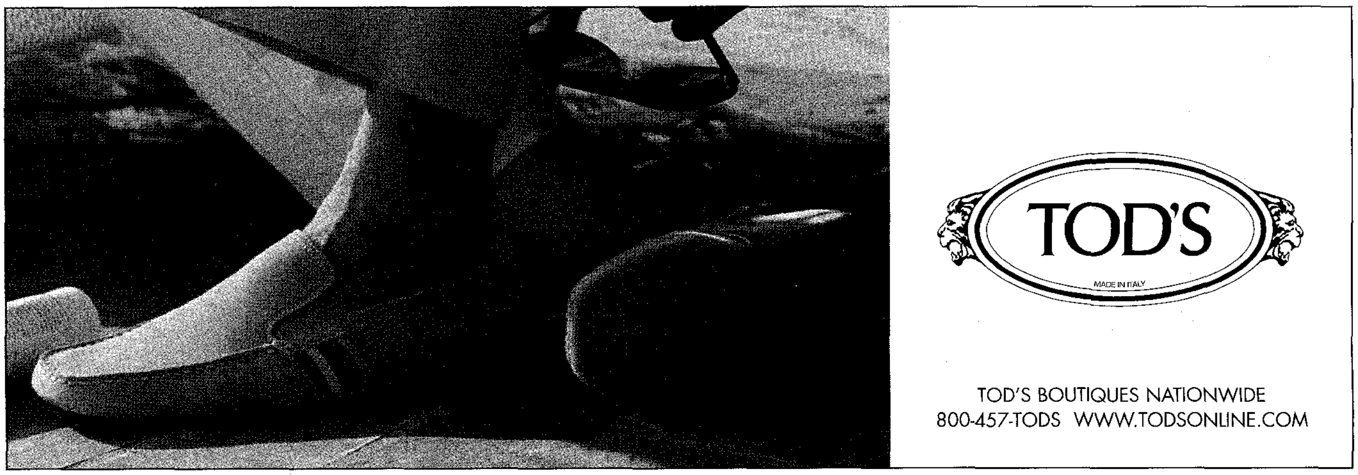
Upstairs seems more suited for seduction, with flattering lighting and cozy, side-by-side banquettes (indeed, many of the tables were occupied by amorous couples). The menu here is prix fixe and seasonal, with the usual hospitable touches inflected with whimsy, like an amuse-bouche of a frog leg that arrived in a tiny bowl placed atop a lily pad, with a silver frog perched on its lip. Dishes are complex, almost confused: a wonderful *dodine* of foie gras and pigeon came with mâche, roasted apple, and an extraordinarily gelatinous mustard jam. But the accompaniments mostly work to the benefit of the star item: in the risotto, tender clams gave sharp counterpoint to the woodsy mushrooms, while crepinettes and raviolinis, filled with ricotta and chives, were simple harmonies to the well-seasoned prime beef. The solicitous service extends even beyond the last course; when a guest expressed delight at the apple crumb cake that diners are given on the way out, the host asked, "Would you like another?" (The café is open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; the dining room is open daily for dinner. Café entrées $17-$26; dining room prix fixe $85.)

—Andrea Thompson

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

AVALON
47 W. 20th St. (212-807-7780)—April 8: **Donna the Buffalo,** a winning ensemble from Ithaca, New York, seasons its down-home sound with a touch of reggae. In fact, the group has just returned from Jamaica, where it took part in a massive jam-band party in Negril.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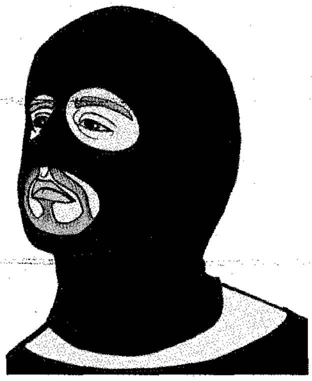
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DEAD CAN DANCE

Comic ballets are a rare commodity, and therefore Brian Reeder, who for the past four years has been making extremely witty pieces for small troupes, should be given a look by larger troupes. For the "Works & Process" series at the Guggenheim in March, Reeder created something like a tiny Japanese horror movie, "Gotcha!," for American Ballet Theatre's junior company. Four fresh-faced teens arrive for a beach party, but soon someone else joins them: a black-clad figure, complete with balaclava, carrying a dead body. He deposits it onstage and walks off, but soon he is back, and more corpses are sticking out of the wings. What is so funny is the utter calm, even politeness, of the death figure. He might be a Parks Department employee, emptying the trash. Also, the transactions of the panicked teens are completely "classroom." Legs jab out in horror, but in perfect développés. Feet scrunch up in fear, but they are exquisitely arched. Reeder spent seventeen years dancing for classical companies. "Ballet is my backbone," he says. But he's also seen a lot of movies.



JASON GREENBERG

—*Joan Acocella*

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—April 8: The gospel diva **Yolanda Adams**, who has helped popularize Christian music by infusing it with smooth R. & B. and up-tempo funk. April 11: **King's X**, the thinking man's heavy-metal trio, eschews genre clichés in favor of taking a progressive approach.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—April 4-5: The young British rock band **Art Brut.** April 6: The Norwegian prodigy **Sondre Lerche** has found great success with his pop confections, but he heads in a different direction with his latest release. "Duper Sessions" is a collection of acoustic jazz songs featuring piano, bass, drum, and guitar accompaniment. On paper, it sounds like a real departure, but that tender voice remains the same. And who can quarrel with a Scandinavian cover of Cole Porter's "Night and Day"?

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—For years, **What I Like About Jew**, the musical comedy duo of Sean Altman and Rob Tannenbaum, has been polishing its shtick around town. On April 6, backed by members of the Loser's Lounge band, the two celebrate the release of their first CD, "Unorthodox," which gives them the opportunity to expose the nation to the likes of "They Tried to Kill Us (We Survived, Let's Eat)," "JDate," and "Jews Jews Jews." With the Hasidic reggae singer Matisyahu recently rising in Billboard's Top Ten, who knows how far these two can go?

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—April 8: The guitarist and singer **Junior Brown** is capable of switching from rapid-fire chicken pickin' to delicate slide work in the course of a single bar. His songs favor heartbreak, hillbillies, and fools. April 10: The illustrator and artist **Ben Katchor** and the musician **Mark Mulcahy** present "The Rosenbach Company," a wholly original piece of musical theatre that uses drawings and songs to tell the story of two brothers, Dr. A. S. W. and Philip Rosenbach. The two were leading collectors of books and decorative-art objects in the first half of the twentieth century, and their home in Philadelphia, which is now a museum, includes a bookcase that once belonged to Herman Melville, manuscripts for Joyce's "Ulysses" and Conrad's "Lord Jim," and thousands of drawings by the children's-book author Maurice Sendak.

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—April 5: **Dayna Kurtz**, a slide guitarist from New Jersey with a remarkable voice. On her last album, "Beautiful Yesterday," she distilled beauty out of melancholy as she covered songs by the likes of Billie Holiday, Prince, and Leonard Cohen. She went to the Sonoran Desert to write material for her forthcoming album, "Another Black Feather." It has a beautiful tribute to New Orleans, which was written before Hurricane Katrina, and it also deals deftly with the consequences of a happy relationship (a tricky situation for any singer-songwriter).

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—April 6: **Th' Legendary Shack Shakers** cook up a strong brew that's two parts rockabilly, one part punk. With **Hazmat Modine.** What do you get when you combine a pair of harmonicas, a tuba, some drums, a lap steel guitar, a trumpet, and the throat-singing group Huun-Huur-Tu? You get "Bahamut," the début album by this group, led by the singer and harmonica player Wade Schuman. They play blues originals mostly, which are the product of Schuman's limitless imagination. His voice, for that matter, appears to be bottomless. April 7-8: The **Heartless Bastards**, a powerful three-piece rock band from Cincinnati, and Detroit's **Soledad Brothers.**

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—April 4-5: Pink Floyd's chilly one-off performance at the Live 8 concert this past summer led to persistent rumors of the band's getting back together, but there are no official plans afoot. And, if further evidence is needed that Pink Floyd will remain nothing more than a memory, the band's venerable guitarist **David Gilmour** has revived his solo career. His new album, "On an Island," is his first under his own name since 1984. It finds the revered string-bender in a contemplative mood, but there are enough traces of his signature guitar wail to satisfy even the most devoted of the Floyd faithful.

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—April 12: **Tonearm** is the stage name of Ilias Bias, a refugee from academia (he did graduate work in sound analysis and synthesis at the University of Chicago) who was born in Russia and grew up in Moscow. Tonearm mixes computer technology with rock-solid songwriting. There's a little bit of Syd Barrett, a little bit of John Lennon, and whole lot of heartrending loneliness in his work.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—April 11: **Regina Spektor** offers a preview of her sophomore album, "Begin to Hope," which is due out in June. The young piano player and singer was born in Moscow, but she grew up in the Bronx and made her name on the local anti-folk scene. She has a pungent and engaging take on the singer-songwriter genre, leading people to describe her sound as unconventional. There are times, however, when she sounds as cool and crisp as an old-fashioned FM-radio star. The track "Better," which features the guitarist Nick Valensi, of the Strokes, is a sweet anthem just waiting to meet the title sequence of a teen-friendly movie.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 6-7: The alt-country vixen **Neko Case.** April 9-10: **Wolf Parade**, an indie-rock band from Montreal, has been touted as the next big thing from Canada, which in certain circles is quite a big deal (in the past year or so, its home city has become a hotbed of musical action). April 11: The enchanting singer **Beth Orton.**

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
April 7: **Tinariwen** are a group of Tuareg tribesmen who once fought in Mali's civil war. They've since traded their rifles for guitars, and they practice bluesy rock with revolutionary fervor. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) April 8: **Eva Ayllón** sings Afro-Peruvian music with gleeful abandon. Here she'll be backed by a band that includes percussionists on the *cajón*, the box drum that traces its origins back to the fruit crates Peruvian slaves turned into drums. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

ZEBULON
258 Wythe Ave., between Metropolitan Ave. and N. 3rd St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-217-6934)—April 5: **Himalayas**, a marching-band collective with a frequently morphing name led by the drummer Kenny Wollesen and the saxophonist Jonathon Haffner, can include anywhere from three to a hundred and thirty musicians, depending on the gig. (Past shows have included a tap dancer, someone playing balloons, and singing by Jonas Mekas, the Lithuanian poet and founder of Anthology Film Archives). Here the group will consist of five percussionists, multiple brass and woodwind players, and the downtown singer-songwriters Tony Scherr, on guitar, and Jesse Harris, on banjo.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—April 4-9: Five nights of saxophone bliss as the modern tenor titan **David Murray** splits a double bill with **Odean Pope.** Murray is bringing in his quartet, featuring the drummer **Hamid Drake**, and the Philadelphian heavyweight Pope is convening his mighty Sax Choir.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—April 4-9: **Louis Hayes** and the **Cannonball Adderley Legacy Band.** Both Cannonball Adderley and his brother and longtime partner, Nat, are gone, but the drummer Hayes, the swinging motor behind the Adderley unit during its glory days, carries on the funky bop tradition. The alto saxophonist **Vincent Herring** evokes Cannonball effectively, and the special guest vocalist **Paula West** will buff up "Save Your Love for Me" and other gems from the famed Nancy Wilson-Adderley collaboration of 1961.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—April 4-8: The vocalist **Linda Eder**, who has successfully

gleaned what's most palatable from the over-the-top approach of her two major influences, Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—April 6-7: Many young mainstream jazz players imagine themselves as participants in classic Blue Note recording sessions, but the drummer **Joe Chambers** has actually been there. A superbly sensitive percussionist and solid composer, Chambers is a living link to a glorious era, one that, to his credit, he looks beyond. Monday nights belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—**Regina Carter** and **Barry Harris** may both come from Detroit, but their similarities end there. The seventy-six-year-old Harris is a revered second-generation bebop pianist who proudly adheres to the idiom; Carter is a forward-thinking violinist willing to incorporate roots music and funk in her mix. Both players will première long-form works on April 7-8 at the Rose Theatre.

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
2 W. 64th St. (212-874-5210)—April 6: **Medeski Martin & Wood** have shown many sides in their career. At times they've experimented with Grateful Dead space-set passages, and at other points in their history they've played straight-ahead piano jazz. Expect a diverse evening with a twist. The group is performing acoustically as it marks the release of its new compilation, "Note Bleu: The Best of the Blue Note Years, 1998-2005."

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—April 7: The **Charlie Burnham** quartet. Burnham, a Brooklyn-born violinist, singer, and composer, gets an utterly unique and vocal sound from his instrument. He just finished touring with the guitarist James (Blood) Ulmer in his Odyssey band, which was named after the much acclaimed album they recorded in 1983. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—April 4-9: Compared to the outré configurations of **Paul Motian's** other ensembles, the quartet he's playing in here, featuring a saxophone, piano, and bass, suggests conventional mainstream jazz. Don't believe it. With the idiosyncratic drummer leading such staunch individualists as the pianist **Masabumi Kikuchi** and the saxophonist **Greg Osby,** the results will be anything but routine. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Fabric of Life: Ikat Textiles of Indonesia."** The word "ikat" derives from a verb meaning "to tie," and the ancient textile art is surely the most exacting form of tie-dye ever invented. Each island in the Indonesian archipelago has its own traditions, but all involve an intensive process whereby the woven fabric's warp and weft are dyed separately, so that a pattern—tight chevrons, complex medallions, interlocking stripes—emerges only on the loom. The panels displayed include shawls, hip cloths, and other wearable articles, along with coverlets, tapestries, and divination cloths dense with glyphic designs. The palette is sombre and delicious, ranging from dark blood red to chocolate brown and indigo. Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Samuel Palmer (1805-1881): Vision and Landscape."** A major retrospective, co-organized with the British Museum, reviews the work of the Romantic-era landscape painter. Through May 29. ♦ **"Kara Walker at the Met: After the Deluge."** In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the artist known for her politically charged silhouette cutouts contemplates the effects of watery disasters on African-American communities, through a selection of her own work and items chosen from the permanent collection. Through July 30. ♦ **"A Taste for Opulence: Sèvres Porcelain from the Collection."** Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh."** Through July 9. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul"** is the first American museum retrospective of the Norwegian artist (1863-1944) in thirty years. Through May 8. ♦ In **"Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking,"** artists from Islamic backgrounds examine their cultures and homelands, mostly from afar. Unexpectedly, perhaps, women reign. Included are works by Mona Hatoum, Shirin Neshat, Ghada Amer, Shahzia Sikander, Shirazeh Houshiary, Emily Jacir, and Marjane Satrapi. Through May 22. ♦ The retrospective **"John Szarkowski: Photographs."** Through May 15. ♦ **"On-Site: New Architecture in Spain."** Through May 1. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"David Smith: A Centennial."** Smith (1906-65) parlayed his experiences as a welder, an employee of the Studebaker company, a painter, and an acolyte of the Cubist movement into tremendous steel sculptures that were championed by Clement Greenberg and have become emblems of American modernism. Through May 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Day for Night,"** the 2006 Biennial, curated by Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles. More than a hundred artists are represented. Through May 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"William Wegman: Funney/Strange."** This major retrospective goes beyond clever, anthropomorphic photographs of Weimaraners (though those are here, too) with forty years of the artist's paintings, drawings, videos, and films. Through May 28. ♦ **"Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a re-creation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas like those that he encountered in the Galápagos Islands. Through Aug. 20. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for the eighth year. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

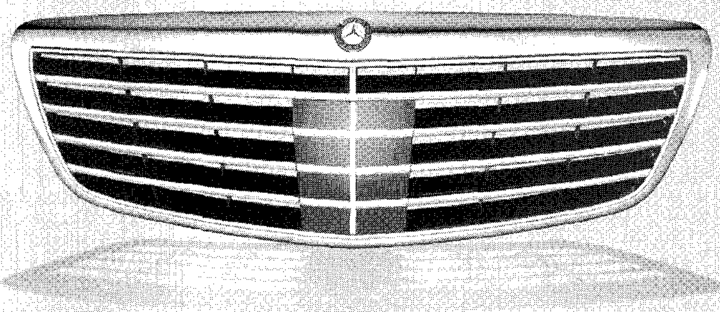
ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Asia Society, which celebrates the occasion with **"A Passion for Asia: The Rockefeller Family Collects,"** a show honoring its patrons. Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Stories to Tell: Masterworks from the Kelly Collection of American Illustration."** Through May 21. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—The spring "Selections" show turns the Drawing Room project space into a screening room for **"Analog Animations."** Through April 15. ♦ **"Joëlle Tuerlinckx: Drawing Inventory."** Through April 22. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Goya's Last Works."** Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5. The galleries for the Goya exhibition will stay open until 8 on Friday evenings for the duration of the show.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"The Mythic City: Photographs of New York by Samuel H. Gottscho, 1925-1940."** Through April 9. ♦ **"Transformed**



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by Light: The New York Night," an exhibition that considers the impact of electrical lights on city life, whether in office buildings or homes, in neon signs or on the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. Through May 7. ♦ **"Timescapes"** compresses four hundred years of New York City history into a twenty-two-minute presentation of morphing maps and archival photographs. It's an absorbing biography of the metropolis, neatly organized into chapters that outline the city's explosion out into its five boroughs, up into skyscrapers, and down into the subway system. Ongoing. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—The title **"Klee in America"** is a bit of a misnomer, since Klee never set foot Stateside. Nonetheless, it's an excuse for gazing upon the German modernist's eternally fresh and quirky paintings of mask faces, prism cities, and squiggly flotsam extracted, following the logic of Surrealist theory, from the unconscious. The American connection is made via a rogues' photo gallery of his North American collectors, among them Clifford Odets, Albert Barnes, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, and Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Klee's real influence is obvious in the works themselves, however—particularly those from the nineteen-thirties, which seem like templates for Abstract Expressionism in the next decade and for work by painters like Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock. Through May 22. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

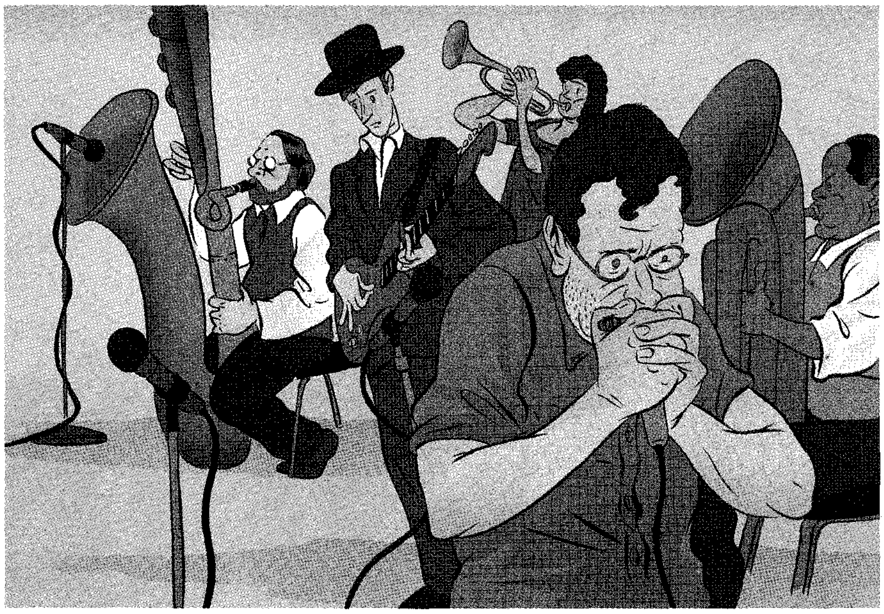
Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

PIERRE HUYGHE / THIERRY DE CORDIER
An opportunity to see more work by Huyghe, who is, along with Rirkrit Tiravanija and Thomas Hirschhorn, one of the artists of the moment (and deservedly so). Unlike his other, mostly landscape-based films (the one currently on view in the Whitney Biennial was filmed in Antarctica and Central Park), "This Is Not a Time for Dreaming" is a rumination on creativity, authorship, and institutions—staged with marionettes impersonating Huyghe, Le Corbusier, curators at Harvard's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, and a Darth Vader-ish figure called Mr. Harvard, Dean of Deans. Next to Huyghe's film, de Cordier's paintings and drawings of blacked-out Madonnas—abstract humps that he's somehow decided define femininity—register as vapid and facile. Through April 15 and April 8, respectively. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

SALLY MANN
Mann's recent shows have centered on the history-haunted Southern landscape, and half of the photographs in her new show were made at Antietam, Manassas, and other sites of Civil War battles. But the other pictures here update the more intimate history that she began in "Immediate Family" (1992) with an extraordinary series of recent portraits of her children, Jessie, Virginia, and Emmett. Printed in an obsolete, accident-prone wet-plate process, these close-cropped head shots look like they were rescued from antiquity; their faces might have been carved in stone, then weathered for centuries. Though larger than life and unavoidably memorial, the work dispels any death-mask chill with a fierce, soulful warmth. Through April 22. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

CARL VAN VECHTEN
A critic and novelist who championed the Harlem Renaissance in the nineteen-twenties, Van Vechten turned his attention to photography in the following decades. His main focus was portraiture, and his subjects were all friends and acquaintances in the arts, sixty-five of whom are gathered here for a star-studded bash. Even if Van Vechten's inventiveness didn't extend much beyond his choice of studio backdrops—crinkled silver lamé was a favorite—he managed to get great performances from Marlon Brando, Bessie Smith, Salvador Dali, Henri Cartier-Bresson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Joe Louis, Langston Hughes, and a host of other legends in their prime. Through May 6. (Cummins, 699 Madison Ave., at 62nd St. 212-688-6441.)

FRED WILSON
Wilson takes a formalist turn, transforming the mammies, jockeys, and other caricatures he's used in the past to critique racism in America into slick, virtually abstract sculptures blown from glass. The vestiges of his old subjects are still there: white eyes hover on the surface of bulging black biomorphic glass orbs; an elaborate, Gothic-looking chandelier is executed entirely in black glass; dark-shaded vitrines, like those found in natural-history museums, hold a skeleton, antique inkwells, and oilcans. The critique of official histories is still evident, but it's considerably more oblique; for viewers not familiar with his work, it's probably in danger of being absent. Through April 15. (PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)



Hazmat Modine brings its wild sounds to the Mercury Lounge on April 6.

ZOHAR LAZAR

Short List

PETER BEGLEY: Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 212-879-6606. Through April 22. **FRANCIS PICABIA:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through April 15. **TOM WESSELMANN:** L & M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through April 15. **"RARE SPECIMEN":** The Arsenal Gallery, in Central Park, entrance at 64th St. and Fifth Ave. For more information, call 311. Through April 12. **"STILL LIFE":** De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 212-327-1482. Through April 15.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

PHIL COLLINS
This Brighton-based artist's videos pivot in quick and complicated ways, careering from funny to poignant to depressing in the space of a few frames. "Return of the Real" features Turkish reality-show participants speaking at a Collins-arranged press conference in Istanbul and, individually, with an interviewer he hired; it's a contradictory forum in which the participants simultaneously "explain" their stories and undergo further exploitation. A second project finds young Turks singing karaoke versions of songs from the Smiths album "The World Won't Listen." Performed by amateurs with a limited command of English, Morrissey's mournful ditties reflect both their disaffected origins and the larger geopolitical climate. Through April 15. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

TARA DONOVAN
One perennial definition of art is that it's supposed to help us see the commonplace in a new light. With this apparently in mind, Donovan takes the plastic cup as her muse. She fills an enormous, wooden-raftered gallery with the humble sculptural unit, carpeting the concrete floor with an undulating landscape made by pushing variably tall columns of stacked cups close together. Half make-believe Arctic wilderness and half computer model realized in aggressively low-tech terms, Donovan's shimmering white expanse exerts a charm well beyond the sum of its repeating parts. Through April 22. (PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-929-7000.)

JEFF ELROD
The new frontiers in painting look uncannily like the old ones at times, but at least, in Elrod's case, they're achieved in a manner that exploits the latest technological advances. Acrylic-on-raw-canvas paintings carry vestiges of squiggly psychic automatism and a strong whiff of Basquiat, although the meandering lines, drawn with a computer mouse, rarely resolve into figures or recognizable shapes. Bright, primary-color bursts simultaneously conjure Adolph Gottlieb, graffiti art, or Mondrians afflicted by a computer virus. The other Holy Grail in painting these days is eschewing a signature style and creating solo exhibitions that could pass as group shows. In this Elrod succeeds as well. Through April 8. (Fredericks & Freiser, 536 W. 24th St. 212-633-6555.)

BRIAN JUNGEN
The Vancouver-based Jungen's talent lies in disassembling consumer products and reshaping the materials into politically charged sculpture. At the New Museum last fall, Nike sneakers were reconfigured into Pacific Northwest aboriginal masks; lawn chairs became giant whale skeletons. Here, the white leather covering on softballs is sewn into skulls that rest on the floor; soundtracks ("Lord of the Rings," various Westerns) play from speakers nestled inside. The wood interiors of Ikea couches are reconstructed into armatures that bear saddles stitched from their leather upholstery, which buck and quiver in response to their own soundtracks. Jungen's critique, which often borders on the over-determined, is somewhat obscure here. He's still got a Picasso-like knack for transforming mundane objects into visually arresting sculpture, though. Through April 15. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

MARTIN PARR
Perhaps to underscore their rude, gleeful iconoclasm, these photographs from the one-off "Fashion Magazine" collection that Parr published last year have been pushpinned to the wall like protest posters. Working within the system, often for mainstream glossies, as well as for his own amusement, Parr mocks the conventions of the fashion shoot with pictures of gaudy jewels displayed alongside dead fish on crushed ice, lipstick traces on souvenir mugs, and jockeys posed

next to models so tall their heads are cut off at the photo's upper edge. The satire, which also skewers air-kissing celebrities and other overdressed party people, *may not be subtle, but it's definitely fun.* Through April 15. (Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778.)

FAIRFIELD PORTER
At first sight, Porter's paintings project a child's-picture-puzzle simplicity. But the longer one looks, the more complicated they get. The genteel bohemian habitats of Maine and outer Long Island in the fifties and sixties were Porter's haunts, and the show is filled with snowy townscapes and sun-dappled summer lawns. His portraits depict New York School artist pals, like the poets John Ashbery and James Schuyler. But the devil is in the details—the beige and forest-green dabs that make up the chintz couch whereon the poets sit; the blue snow shadows slyly slithering off the canvas; the sketchy, majestic, somehow privately amused trees. Through April 15. (Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772.)

CHARLOTTA WESTERGREN
Westergren takes sibling rivalry to a new level, remaking a series of works painted by her failed-artist sister, Carolina. Alone, Charlotta's paintings are merely competent realist depictions of mundane subjects: a sailor, a sunbather, a party gathering. Seen alongside Carolina's lopsided efforts (reproductions of which are handily available at the front desk), they seem to be alternately loving and cruel meditations on dreams, ambition, and fate, as well as on the artist's first, and perhaps most critical, audience—her family. Memory is invoked via stranger methods in a back-room installation that attempts to recreate the light and smell of the Swedish seaside town where Westergren spent girlhood summers. The light redux recalls Spencer Finch's luminous, poetic works, although his, thankfully, don't include olfactory traces of salt and fish. Through April 8. (Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave. 212-929-5959.)

Short List

FIONA BANNER: Printed Matter, 195 Tenth Ave. 212-925-0325. Through April 15. **JENNIFER AND KEVIN MCCOY:** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323. Through April 8. **CHRISTOPH RUCKHÄBERLE:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through April 8. **"THE TRACE OF A TRACE OF A TRACE":** Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000. Through April 15.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

INA GEISSLER / STEFANIE BÜHLER / CHRISTIAN KORTH / PETER FRANCK AND KATHLEEN TRIEM
The suburban house—especially as an avatar of tidy/desperate confinement—inspires work by three young German artists. Geissler's paintings abstract cheap residential details like corrugated plastic sheeting or striped awnings, while Korth assembles used appliances and furniture into a pseudo-new, faux-hygienic, shrink-wrapped bundle. Bühler's little green island sculptures, attended by an old-man doll with a cane, suggest a child's fantasies of escape. Outside, Franck and Triem's installation of an architectural model enlarged to just-habitable height plays on flimsy dreams of a grownup life. The indoor show is up through April 17; the outdoor through July 17. (Black & White, 483 Driggs Ave. 718-599-8775.)

"MATERIAL WORLD"
Taking another tack, this group of five artists offers varied commentary on the urban landscape, with sculpture burrowed into bustling public spaces in downtown Brooklyn. Corin Hewitt's "Legacy" is a rainbow made from street-sweeping detritus—dirt, candy wrappers, and bottle caps—cast in bronze and resin, arcing out of a dormant flower bed. Two species of cylinder are jointed to make Peter Kreider's leggy marble fire hydrants that conjure Greek columns, and Mamiko Otsubo's little greenhouses installed in a building's atrium bring a mediated version of nature to the corporate environment. Also included are pieces by Matthew Day Jackson and Rachel Foullon. Through Sept. 10. (MetroTech Center, Brooklyn, Public Art Fund. 212-980-4575.)

DANCE

"FEST FORWARD: HIP-HOP UNBOUND"
Despite the cancellation of the former headliner, Rennie Harris, young crowds will throng the Skirball Center's weeklong celebration of thirty years of hip-hop. A feel-good program pairs the uplifting duo Full Circle—in which Ana Garcia, a.k.a. Rokafella, shares equal billing with B-boy Gabriel (Kwikstep) Dionisio—with the all-female Decadance-theatre, whose members hail from the U.S., Colombia, and Japan. Another evening, "Deep NYC," is a multimedia jam hosted by MC Akim Funk Buddha, packed with fashion shows, videos, live music by the hip-hop group Dujeous, and hard-driving dances by the Japanese group Bi-Trip. For a full schedule, see www.hiphopunbound.com. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. April 3-11. Through April 15.)

JAMES SEWELL BALLET
The Minneapolis-based company makes a welcome return to the Joyce, bringing more of Sewell's marvellously inventive choreography. With its Schubert score, improvised sections, and entrances from the auditorium, "Anagram" has a communal, dances-at-a-gathering feel. In "Involution," the isolated dancers give their spiritual deformity outward form and, in the process, take on a yogic grace. "Guy Noir: The Ballet" brings Garrison Keillor's radio private eye to the stage, with a voice-over by Keillor and a groan-worthy script by Keillor and Sewell that hinges on punning "tulle" and "tool." (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. April 4-5 and April 7 at 8, April 6 at 7:30, April 8 at 2 and 8, and April 9 at 2 and 7:30.)

ALEXANDRA BELLER/DANCES
The voluptuous Beller, once a standout with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, riffs on Sartre's "No Exit" in her intriguing dance "You Are Here." As in the play, the characters are trapped together in a strange place, but, while Sartre's hell was a polite salon, Beller's is a stage with green balloons. Her characters cling to alienating compulsions—spouting etiquette rules, tap-dancing, singing show tunes—yet as they repeat themselves their roles fit together in striking new ways, and Sartre's famous phrases, chopped up and scattered, take on new meanings. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0777. April 5-8 at 7:30.)

WORK & SHOW FESTIVAL
The annual festival concludes with Baraka de Soleil's "N This Hous." Four members of the artistic collective D Underbelly play semi-allegorical characters (Little Boy Blue, He Who Be She) who come together on a bare stage. They give voice to aggrieved African-American memory, chanting hysterical prose poems and moving as if possessed. Later, more autobiographical injuries seem to surface as authoritarian voices define what is not welcome "in the house" of African-American respectability: transgender sexuality, for example, and disco. On Saturday, there will be an all-day marathon reprising most of the festival's performances. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. April 6-7 at 7 and April 8 at 11 A.M.)

"HAPPY HOUR"
If Biff from "Back to the Future," Felix from "The Odd Couple," and the late Vincent Schiavelli had had a comedy act, it might have turned out something like "Happy Hour." In their new mime- and vaudeville-inspired evening-length show, Matt Morgan, Ambrose Martos, and Mark Gindick, all graduates of the Ringling Brothers Clown College, do the occasional pop-and-lock routine, plus a modern dance choreographed by David Neumann. There's even live cello accompaniment—until the cellist gets sore about the whoopee cushion. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 6-7 at 8:30 and April 8 at 4 and 8:30.)

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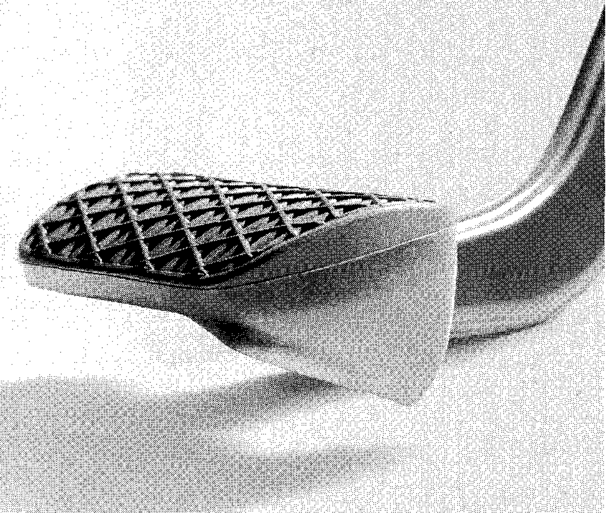

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April 11th
POETRY IN WARTIME
ELIZA GRISWOLD, VIJAY SESHADRI,
ROBERT PINSKY, and
C. K. WILLIAMS read from their
work and the work of wartime poets,
and talk with ADAM GOPNIK

April 25th
HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., in
conversation with SIMON SCHAMA

7 P.M. Doors open at 6:30
Miller Theatre
at Columbia University
2960 Broadway (at 116th Street)

All events are free.
Please visit cuarts.com or
newyorker.com for more
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THE KEVIN WYNN COLLECTION
Since 1983, Kevin Wynn's pickup company has been performing his big, elaborate dances, filled with rushing, swirling waves of movement and ever-shifting patterns. "Tracing Sirocco," his newest work, for seventeen dancers, is set in an abstract Africa and was conceived in the oppressive heat of a New York summer; it concerns man's struggle to survive in a difficult, complicated world and his need for connection with others in order to transcend his limitations. This metaphor for coöperation is echoed in the complex partnerings of dancers and in the ceaseless kineticism of the group as a whole. (Ailey Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. April 7-8 at 8 and April 9 at 7.)

"BALLET BUILDERS"
The yearly showcase of choreographers working in the vocabulary of ballet returns to Florence Gould Hall. This year, there will be seven works, including a sexy trio set to music by Piazzolla—filled with fast turns and kicks and tricky lifts—by Salim Gauwloos, a Moroccan-Belgian dancer and choreographer who has performed with the Royal Ballet of Flanders and toured with Madonna; a nonet by Helen Heineman, a former dancer with Nederlands Dans Theatre and Harkness Ballet who now runs her own company; and "Where Is the Love?," a spare pas de deux for two women set to characteristically wistful music by Arvo Pärt, by the Austrian-born Robert Sher-Machherndl, the director of the Lemon Sponge Cake company in Boulder, Colorado. (55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. April 8 at 8 and April 9 at 3.)

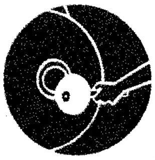
LES BALLETS GRANDIVA
Like the Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo (with whom Grandiva's founder and artistic director, Victor Trevino, used to dance), this all-male ballet troupe does fractured classics with campy gusto. Smallish guys in tutus and toe shoes are partnered with larger ones in tights, with results ranging from the uproarious to the strangely poignant. The nineteen-member troupe aims squarely for the funny bone in sendups of "Stars and Stripes Forever" and the pas de deux from "Le Corsaire" and in a new parody of Balanchine's "Serenade" by the Trocks' Peter Anastos. But the supple Allen Dennis hits surprisingly blue, plaintive notes in his quite refined rendition of Pavlova's signature solo, "The Dying Swan." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 10 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
April 5 at 8 and April 8 at 1:30: Massenet's **"Manon,"** a sumptuous piece of late-nineteenth-century melodrama revived for Renée Fleming last fall, returns with its star in place, sharing the stage with such singers as Massimo Giordano (in his début, as Des Grieux), Jean-Luc Chaignaud, Hao Jiang Tian, and Jean-Paul Fouchécourt; Jesús López-Cobos conducts. (These are the final performances.) ♦ April 6 and April 10 at 8: The Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata,"** always a crowd-pleaser, returns with Hei-Kyung Hong, Frank Lopardo, and Dwayne Croft in the leading roles; Marco Armiliato. ♦ April 7 and April 11 at 8: Donizetti's deft and charming **"Don Pasquale,"** not heard at the Met for a quarter century, arrives with a new production (by Otto Schenk) and major star power: Anna Netrebko and Juan Diego Flórez as the pair of scheming young lovers, Mariusz Kwiecien as the cunning, helpful doctor, and Simone Alaimo as the Don, their bumbling mark. Maurizio Benini conducts. ♦ April 8 at 8: The unflappable Karita Mattila shines in the title role of **"Fidelio,"** in a revival of Jürgen Flimm's bracing modern production that also features Amy Burton, Richard Margison (a divinely weary Florestan), John Nuzzo, Alan Held, Kristinn Sigmundsson, and James Morris; Paul Nadler. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
April 5 at 7:30: The final performance of **"Lysistrata, or the Nude Goddess,"** a melodically winning wartime comedy by Mark Adamo freely adapted from the play by Aristophanes. Emily Pulley, Myrna Paris, Jennifer Rivera, Victoria Livengood, Chad Shelton, and James Bobick are the standouts in an indefatigable ensemble cast; George Manahan conducts. ♦ April 6 at 7:30 and April 8 at 8: James Robinson's staging of **"La Bohème,"** set in Paris during the First World War, features Yunah Lee, Jennifer Black, Gerard Powers, and Philip Torre; David Wroe. ♦ April 7 at 8, April 9 at 1:30, and April

POP NOTES
FROM A TO ZÉ



The Brazilian musician Tom Zé is turning seventy this year. Zé is one of the founders of tropicalia, a loose musical aggregation that began in São Paulo in the late nineteen-sixties; leaned heavily on late-period Beatles, bossa nova, and studio experimentation; and included such performers as Zé, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil. In the early nineteen-nineties, when Zé was unknown in the United States, David Byrne issued, on his Luaka Bop label, a selection of Zé's earlier work. This was not a minor development—Zé was about to start working at a gas station when Byrne called. Zé's songs sound like they were written by someone who knows only a few of the rules but wants to get in the game right away. Short, simple phrases are layered over each other in distinct rhythms, creating an effect like a round. Zé has a distinct preference for the high and chattering sounds of instruments like the cavaquinho—a Brazilian relative of the ukulele—and something that sounds like a very squeaky harpsichord. When he feels especially percussive, he will break out a household item like a bicycle pump or a vacuum cleaner. (During a rare live performance at Irving Plaza in 1999, Zé played a solo with a metal grinder.)

Zé's newest album, **"Estudando o Pagode"** (Luaka Bop), is described as an "unfinished operetta" about power, gender, and the role of women in society. Zé has dedicated the album to five cultural figures, including Charles Darwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and his extensive liner notes include quotations such as "The school of male chauvinism is the home, or the home of male chauvinism is the school?" Non-Portuguese speakers may want to read the translated libretto, which plays out the story of a black teen-ager who, after being mistreated by a professor, abuses his girlfriend. She then turns to prostitution to pay for her psychology studies. Even without the words, Zé is fluent in the language of sound. There's a chorus of chipmunks (or at least sped-up humans), a loud female orgasm, and a range of bright musical loops that bounce comfortably off each other. One can only hope that an American benefactor will be brave enough to mount this merry disquisition on a stage here and coax Zé into performing again.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

11 at 7:30: Jonathan Eaton's production of Bizet's **"Carmen"** elegantly reflects the opera's psychological shades of warmth and coolness, from its sun-washed Seville porticoes to its cavernous, garnet-draped tavern. Kate Aldrich, an up-and-coming mezzo-soprano, takes the title role, sharing the stage with Laquita Mitchell, Robert Breault, and Michael Chioldi; Manahan. ♦ April 8 at 1:30: The sturdy Harold Prince production of **"Don Giovanni,"** with Orla Boylan, Elizabeth Caballero, Yeghishe Manucharyan, Christopher Schaldenbrand, and Robert Gierlach in the leading roles; Steven Mosteller. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

AMATO OPERA
The East Village's little home-town opera company offers Mozart's **"Don Giovanni,"** sung in Italian and prepared under the musical and dramatic direction of its patriarch, Anthony Amato. Expect colorful singing and playing in the committed, if scrappy, Italian-hill-town manner. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. April 8 at 7:30 and April 9 at 2:30. Through April 30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
After a week devoted to Verdi's Requiem, the Philharmonic relaxes a little under the affable British conductor Bramwell Tovey, who leads the orchestra in works by Mozart (including the Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, with Glenn Dicterow), Zwilich (her "American Concerto," with the trumpeter Philip Smith), and Franck (the Symphony in D Minor). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. April 6 at 7:30 and April 7 at 11 A.M.)

YOUNG CONCERT ARTISTS: IRENE DIAMOND CONCERT
The organization, a promoter of young talent for forty-five years, offers its annual concerto platform to a brood that includes the clarinettist Jose Franch-Ballester (in Copland's Concerto), the bassist Daxun Zhang, and the pianist Lise de la Salle (in Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-Flat Major). Keith Lockhart conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's. (Rose Hall, Broadway at 60th St. 212-307-6656. April 5 at 7:30.)

"SACRED MUSIC IN A SACRED SPACE"
Kent Tritle brings an assemblage of singers and musicians from the worlds of both new music and early music for performances of works by Handel, Pärt (the "Stabat Mater"), and Bach (Cantata No. 56, "Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen," with the baritone Peter Stewart). (Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-288-2520. April 5 at 8.)

JUILLIARD SYMPHONY
Hugh Wolff, an American conductor who has largely worked in Europe after concluding his long tenure at the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, comes home to lead the group in works by Debussy, Britten (the Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings, with Timothy Fallon and Kevin Rivard), and Stravinsky ("The Rite of Spring"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. April 5 at 8.)

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Leonard Slatkin, an unceasing proponent of American music, conducts two concerts at Carnegie Hall featuring the pianist Emanuel Ax. April 6 at 8: Music by Barber, Melinda Wagner (the New York première of her Piano Concerto), and Rachmaninoff (the Symphony No. 2 in E Minor). ♦ April 7 at 8: Elgar's "Introduction and Allegro," Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, and John Corigliano's galvanic Symphony No. 1. (212-247-7800.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "THE GATHERING STORM"
Leon Botstein conducts works by three British composers who thrived in the period between the eclipse of Elgar and the dominance of Britten, and who, scarred by the First World War, saw another one on the horizon—Bliss (the Piano Concerto, with Piers Lane), Bridge ("Oration," with the cellist Matt Haimovitz), and Vaughan Williams (the Fourth Symphony). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5030. April 7 at 8.)

BAM: THE ST. MATTHEW PASSION
The Harvey Theatre is the setting for Jonathan Miller's "street clothes" staging of Bach's masterwork (sung in English), back in Brooklyn for its third presentation in nine years. Paul Goodwin conducts a group of singers and players that includes the tenor Rufus Müller (as the Evangelist) and the bass Curtis Streetman (as Jesus). (651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. April 8 and April 11 at 7:30 and April 9 at 3. Through April 15.)

ROTTERDAM PHILHARMONIC
Valery Gergiev—who conducts twentieth-century Russian repertory with the same authority with which Leonard Bernstein once led Copland and Ives—continues his Avery Fisher Hall cycle of the complete Shostakovich symphonies. April 9 at 3: A very daring program combining the Third Symphony ("The First of May," a propaganda piece) with the Fourth Symphony (a volcanic masterwork written in a film-score style). ♦ April 10 at 8: The valedictory Symphony No. 15 and the beloved Symphony No. 5. (212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
The violist Cynthia Phelps and the baritone Nathaniel Webster join the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio for works by Ravel, Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor), and Ned Rorem ("Aftermath," a recent song cycle). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 4-5 at 8.)

YO-YO MA
The paramount cellist offers a selection of Bach's intimate Suites for Solo Cello in the grand space of Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. April 5 at 8.)

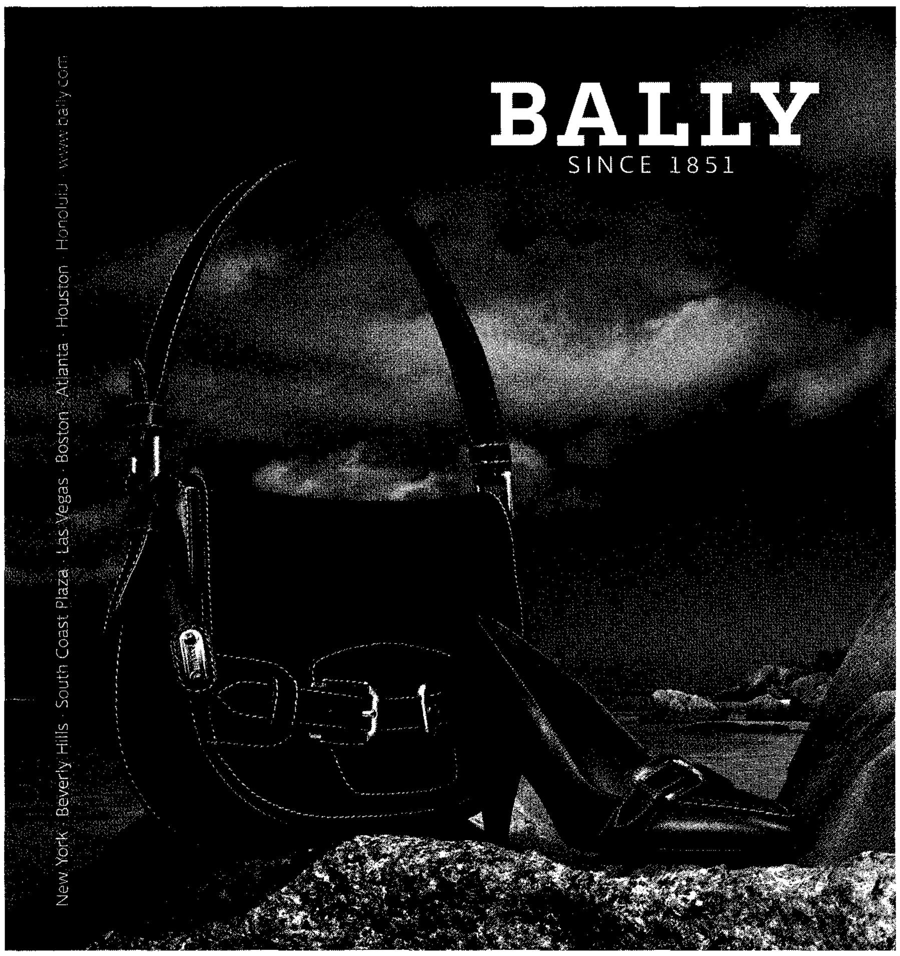
CYGNUS ENSEMBLE
Milton Babbitt's ninetieth-birthday celebrations continue with a concert that includes not only his own music (including "Swan Song No. 1" and "Composition for Twelve Instruments") but also works by Ravel ("Chansons Madécasses") and Varèse. Featuring the soprano Judith Bettina and the guitarist William Anderson. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 5 at 8.)

THOMAS MEGLIORANZA
The young baritone, an immaculate and inventive recitalist, has chosen several works of partially Italian provenance for his next concert: Schubert's arias for Luigi Lablache (the first Don Pasquale), Busoni's "Goethe-Lieder," Fauré's "Mélodies de Venise," and Cathy Berberian's "Stripsody," among others. (Italian Academy, Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Ave. April 5 at 8. 212-854-1623.)

BARGEMUSIC
April 6-7 at 7:30: Gerald Robbins and Katya Mihailova team up for some four-hand piano repertory (including a clutch of Mozart pieces and Schumann's "Pictures from the East"). ♦ April 8 at 7:30 and April 9 at 4: The violinists Mark Peskanov and Aaron Boyd join the cellist Edward Arron and the pianist Helen Huang for a program of works by Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

WU MAN AND THE KRONOS QUARTET
The pi-pa player, a virtuoso of great dramatic flair, joins some old friends for two wide-ranging concerts. April 7 at 7:30: World and New York premières of works by Glenn Branca, J. G. Thirwell, and Terry Riley ("The Cusp of Magic"). (Zankel Hall.) ♦ April 8 at 8: The Bollywood singer Asha Bhosle joins the musicians for a program that features music from the recent Kronos album "You've Stolen My Heart." (Stern Auditorium.) (212-247-7800.)

MILLER THEATRE: RARE FRUITS COUNCIL
George Steel's stylish uptown concert series continues with a program of trio sonatas by Bach, Biber, Locatelli, and Leclair, performed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by the noted European group. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 7 at 8.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

April 8 at 8: The gentlemen of the Guarneri String Quartet offer works by Mozart (the Clarinet Quintet, with David Shifrin), Arriaga, and Dohnányi. ♦ April 10 at 8: Two superlative guitarists—Paco Peña and Eliot Fisk—perform music by Falla, Paganini, and Bach along with a selection of flamenco items. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS

The pianist Olga Kern and the violinist Philippe Quint, two exceptional young Russian musicians, are the ensemble's guests for a concert of works by Ireland, Mozart, and Glinka (the Grand Sextet in E-Flat Major). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. April 10 at 2 and 7:30.)

ANDREAS SCHOLL

The dulcet countertenor, in town for his Met début, joins the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble for works by Handel, Haydn, and Mozart. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 11 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "GODMOTHERS OF SONG"

Another witty program from the director-pianists Steven Blier and Michael Barrett features songs by male composers (Fauré, Poulenc, Rorem, Tchaikovsky, and a new song by Paul Moravec) that wouldn't exist without the women who inspired or paid for them. The selections are sung by Alexandra Montano, Sasha Cooke, and William Sharp. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 11 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE BENCHWARMERS

Rob Schneider, David Spade, and Jon Heder star in this comedy, about adults who start a Little League baseball tournament. Directed by Dennis Dugan. Opening April 7. (In wide release.)

4

A hallucinatory collage of fictional sketches about life in Russia, directed by Ilya Khrzhanovsky. In Russian. Opening April 7. (Cinema Village.)

FREE ZONE

A drama, directed by Amos Gitai, starring Natalie Portman as an American woman who leaves her fiancé in Jerusalem and travels to Jordan. In English, Hebrew, and Arabic. Opening April 7. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

FRIENDS WITH MONEY

Nicole Holofcener wrote and directed this drama, about the single friend (Jennifer Aniston) of three married women in Los Angeles. Opening April 7. (In wide release.)

LUCKY NUMBER SLEVIN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 7. (In wide release.)

95 MILES TO GO

A documentary about Ray Romano, directed by Tom Caltabiano. Opening April 7. (Empire 25.)

ON A CLEAR DAY

A drama about a laid-off Glasgow shipbuilder (Peter Mullan) who decides to swim the English Channel. With Brenda Blethyn. Directed by Gaby Dellal. Opening April 7. (19th Street East 6 and 72nd Street East.)

PHAT GIRLZ

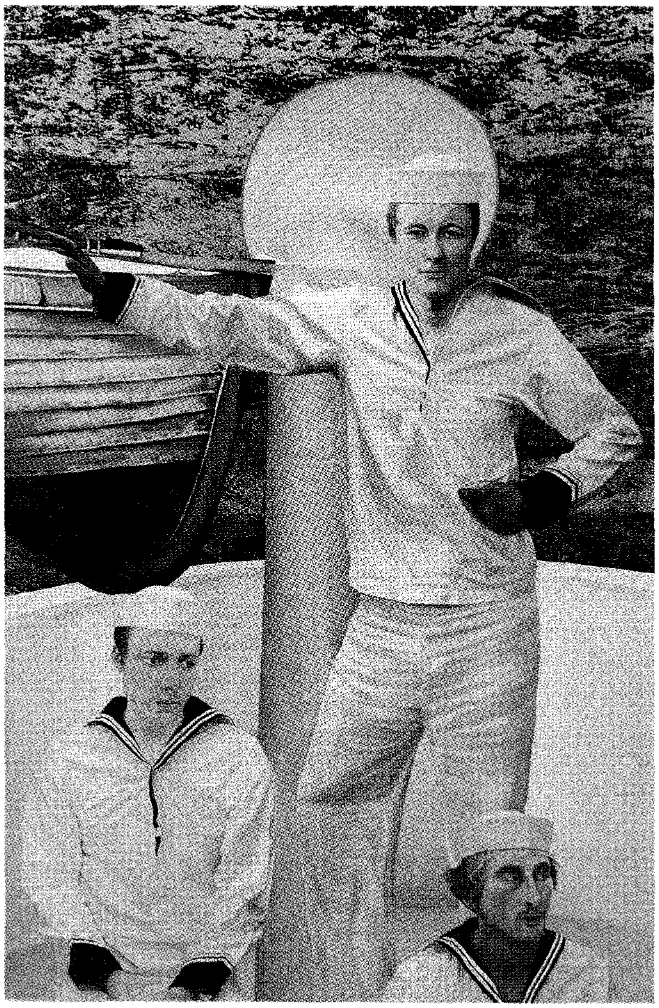
Nnegest Likké directed this comedy, starring Mo'Nique as a plus-size designer. Opening April 7. (In wide release.)

SIMON

A Dutch comedy, directed by Eddy Terstall, about a gay dentist and a café owner who meet at a traffic accident. In English, German, Dutch, and Thai. Opening April 7. (Quad Cinema.)

TAKE THE LEAD

Antonio Banderas stars in this drama as a teacher of ballroom dancing in New York City public schools. Directed by Liz Friedlander. Opening April 7. (In wide release.)



Charlotta Westergren's "Three Sailors," now at Bellwether.

WHEN DO WE EAT?

Jack Klugman, Michael Lerner, and Lesley Ann Warren star in this comedy, about a wild and crazy Passover seder, directed by Salvador Litvak. Opening April 7. (Empire 25.)

NOW PLAYING

AGUIRRE: THE WRATH OF GOD

In 1560, a Spanish expedition under Pizarro's banner set out from Peru to seek El Dorado at the source of the Amazon. After transporting cannons, livestock, and provisions down rugged mountainsides, the company of armored Spaniards and their slaves came under relentless, deadly attack from the inhabitants. In response to the reasoned suggestion of their chief, Ursua (Ruy Guerra), to return to their base in Peru, one cruel and domineering soldier, Aguirre (Klaus Kinski), urged the colonists to mutiny against Ursua, Pizarro, and Spain; mad with fear and lusting for gold, they submitted to this leader, who seemed crazy enough to succeed. More than an allegory for Hitler or a condemnation of imperialism, Werner Herzog's 1972 film about the doomed venture, filmed on location under amazingly difficult conditions (including Kinski's own increasing off-camera resemblance to his character), is an involuted answer to the revolutionary violence of the era, a cinematic blood sacrifice for a complacent West Germany. As Aguirre declares his intention "to stage history as others stage plays," Herzog's delight in this destructive folly (doubled by his own extravagant quest to film it) becomes disturbingly apparent. In German.—*Richard Brody* (Thalia Theatre; April 9 and April 11.)

BRICK

The young director Rian Johnson, after raising money from his friends and parents, pulled off his dream project, a film noir. But in Johnson's version of noir, the inexorable Sam Spade-type detective is a mop-headed student, Brendan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), wearing a sweatshirt and wire-rim glasses, and the setting is not the nighttime big city of Hollywood imagination—the usual claustrophobic noir precinct—but the preposterously sunny skies and wide-open spaces of San Clemente, California. The story, which involves a dead girl and a student drug gang, has the semi-unfathomable complexity of "The Maltese Falcon" and "The Big Sleep," and the characters, lounging against the blank outside wall of the school, speak in cryptic jive patter ("Bulls would only gum it," i.e., cops are dumb). "Brick" is often quite funny, but not in a campy or condescending way—Johnson never makes the distance from the original models seem laughable. The movie develops its own kind of goofy tensions: Johnson renders the wide-open spaces of a school yard as menacing as the darkened rooms of a Warner Bros. thriller.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/3/06.) (Angelika Film Center.)

COBB

"Cobb" cuts right through the winner-take-all ethos of American athletics. It's a raw, inspired, audaciously funny, and unexpectedly moving collaboration between the writer-director Ron Shelton and Tommy Lee Jones. As Tyrus Raymond Cobb, the most aggressive and exciting player in baseball history, Jones pulls off a characterization that amounts to a delirious "up yours" to the forces of civilization, religion, and, of course, hypocrisy. The movie centers on the seventy-two-year-old Cobb's effort in 1960, the last year of his life, to get his autobiography written with the help of a famous sportswriter, Al Stump (Robert Wuhl), who threatens to expose the ballplayer as a homicidal psychopath. There's a straight line between the young man we see in flashback tearing up the base paths (and his opponents) and the adrenalized geezer who commandeers the stage at Harrah's in Reno and, after insulting blacks and Jews, instructs an aghast crowd in the proper way to hit a ball. Yet, near the end, even viewers scared of the character will feel pity, while others will feel an involuntary empathy—after all, even this heinous deity ends life as a weary old man. Released in 1994.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; April 10.)

THE DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON

This fascinating documentary, directed by Jeff Feuerzeig, about one of indie rock's most troubled cult figures, is a thoroughly engrossing look at music and madness. While growing up in a conservative Christian community in Virginia, Daniel Johnston displayed a gift for art, filmmaking, and music, which his fundamentalist family found hard to understand and actively discouraged. He was also an undiagnosed manic-depressive, prone to fits of violence and anger, who caused great harm to those around him. After years of adolescent problems and inertia, he ran off to Austin, Texas, where his songs—simple tunes that have a yearning, childlike emotional quality—gradually made him a local hero. He then began to pursue erratically his quest for stardom. Feuerzeig artfully mines Johnston's hundreds of cassettes and homemade

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MORE VARIATIONS

According to the Web site www.a30a.com, there have been almost three hundred recordings of Bach's Goldberg Variations, using everything from the usual harpsichord or piano to guitar, accordion, handbells, and saxophones. The British keyboardist Richard Egarr, who recently played the Goldbergs at the Frick Collection and has recorded them for Harmonia Mundi, presents the music as Bach might have experienced it, on a harpsichord that has been adjusted to match recent scholarly speculation about the composer's preferred system of tuning. In the equal-tempered tuning that most musicians use today, all keys sound the same, but in older systems some keys sound stranger than others, a fact that Egarr exploits as the variations move into murkier regions. He gets a rich, singing tone from his instrument, but rival versions by Pierre Hantaï and Glen Wilson have more zest. In any harpsichord recording, the Goldbergs become a thing of piercing beauty, which is as it should be; contrary to a now debunked legend, this music wasn't written to put anyone to sleep.

—*Alex Ross*

Super-8 movies to create an eccentric, obsessive portrait of an artist fighting his hallucinatory demons. The result is as nakedly emotional as it is startling.—*Bruce Diones* (Sunshine Cinema.)

DON'T COME KNOCKING

This bittersweet Western blues, directed by Wim Wenders from a script by Sam Shepard, is a minor-key delight. Shepard plays Howard Spence, an aging star of Western films and a legendary tabloid troublemaker who wants out: he sneaks off the set and finds his mother (Eva Marie Saint, in a performance of remarkably high relief), whom he hasn't seen in more than thirty years. She lets slip a word about his son, whom he has never met, and he heads for Butte, Montana, to look for him. What Spence finds there requires some suspension of disbelief—not just his son, Earl (Gabriel Mann), and Earl's mother (Jessica Lange) but also a daughter, Sky (the gossamer Sarah Polley), whom he had with another woman; it's as if no one in Butte around 1980 had ever heard of a paternity suit. The faith in the implausible is rewarded. Shepard's sharp writing memorably delineates the quartet's quirky struggles to connect, and though Wenders, a former master of understatement, overplays the big moments with visual frills, he keeps the outer and inner journeys in delicate balance. Despite the film's false notes, its ballad-like moods ring true.—*R.B.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VÉRONIQUE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Walter Reade Theatre; April 5.)

L'ENFANT (THE CHILD)

A boy is born to a pair of Belgian lovers, who seem hardly more than children themselves. Sonia (Déborah François) is pretty, pained, and underdressed, with broad bones and a dirty laugh. Bruno (Jérémie Renier) is a wastrel and a petty crook, with a hole where his conscience ought to be. He doesn't work, he spends money as soon as he gets it, and, on a whim, he sells the little boy; the remainder of the film, by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, guides us through the aftermath of his folly. Many of the Dardenne trademarks, familiar from "Rosetta," are in place: the bleak and shabby backdrops, the quick but unflamboyant manner of the storytelling, and the urge to delve without scorn into the lives and morals of an underclass. Despite all those virtues, the new film feels laborious—Bruno's actions seem hollow and repugnant, fending off our sympathies, and his presence elbows out the more deserving cases of Sonia and Steve (Jérémie Segard), the teen-aged accomplice to his crimes. The film ends with Bruno in tears, but any parents watching will be far more concerned about the baby, who for some mysterious reason never cries at all. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (3/27/06) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

FIND ME GUILTY

In the late nineteen-eighties, twenty members of the Lucchese crime family were indicted on a variety of charges, and the government tried them all at once, in the same courtroom. All the defendants had lawyers, except for Jackie DiNorscio, who represented himself in a trial that lasted nearly two years. As DiNorscio, Vin Diesel hits some impressive comic and dramatic notes in his portrayal of a raw and halting hulk who is transformed, with the help of the lead attorney (Peter Dinklage) and the tough-love judge (Ron Silver), into an effective, if highly unorthodox, legal presence. Unfortunately, Diesel is about twenty-five years too young for the role, and the director, Sidney Lumet, has not served him well in the wig-and-makeup department. The drama around the character is equally unconvincing; a really interesting story is trapped inside a poorly made film.—*Ken Marks* (In wide release.)

INSIDE MAN

A gang led by an unflustered leader in shades (Clive Owen) holds up a New York bank, taking a small crowd of hostages. Along come the cops (including Willem Dafoe) and a couple of expert negotiators (Denzel Washington and Chiwetel Ejiofor), who, unconvinced by the thieves' demands, begin to wonder what they really want. Other players include Christopher Plummer, as the bank's suspiciously smooth president, and Jodie Foster, as some kind of facilitator; her role is never quite specified, and you could say the same of Spike Lee, who directs the film as if barely enthused by the prospect of a heist. He mangles a few thrills, ignores the claims of logic, and underuses half of his tremendous cast. (The best cameo comes from Florina Petcu, as a shameless, cigarette-waving Albanian floozy.) What does remain, though, is a nervous riff on civic tension, a mean and funny turn from Washington, and—as you might expect from Lee—a constant, low-level venting of racial spleen.—*A.L.* (3/27/06) (In wide release.)

SHE'S THE MAN

This tween comedy, inspired by Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," has the pacing, casting, and dumbed-down plot of a sitcom, but Amanda Bynes, from the Nickelodeon variety program "The Amanda Show," brings a quirky spark and a redeeming loose humor to her role. Viola (Bynes), a soccer ace who is barred from the boys' team because of her sex, hatches a plan to go incognito as her brother, Sebastian (who is out of town), to prove she can play just as well as the boys. When portraying the ersatz Sebastian, Bynes not only looks, somewhat freakishly and rather convincingly, like a baby-faced young man but also uses her arsenal of facial expressions and her uncanny delivery to full comedic effect.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THANK YOU FOR SMOKING

Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), the chief spokesman for the tobacco lobby in Washington, is handsome and likable, a mixture of swagger and impudent candor. Nick knows that his arguments in favor of smoking are rubbish, but he enjoys the game of spin too much to give it up. This shrewdly entertaining satirical comedy, adapted by Jason Reitman (son of the veteran director Ivan Reitman) from Christopher Buckley's 1994 novel, loves the brazen moxie of "sin" lobbyists without being fooled by them. The comic highlight of the movie is the regular lunch sessions that Nick holds with the lobbyists for the alcohol and firearms industries (Maria Bello and David Koechner)—the three of them, boasting of the lethality of their respective clients, might be doing a recurring skit on "Saturday Night Live." When Nick gets written up by a seductive reporter (Katie Holmes) from the Washington *Probe*, his life goes into a tailspin. With Cameron Bright as Nick's adoring son, J. K. Simmons and Robert Duvall as tobacco executives, Rob Lowe and Adam Brody as glib Hollywood types, and William H. Macy as a sanctimonious anti-smoking senator from Vermont who has a collection of maple-syrup bottles in his office. Jason Reitman's direction is fast-moving and witty; the movie is a winner.—*D.D.* (4/3/06) (In wide release.)

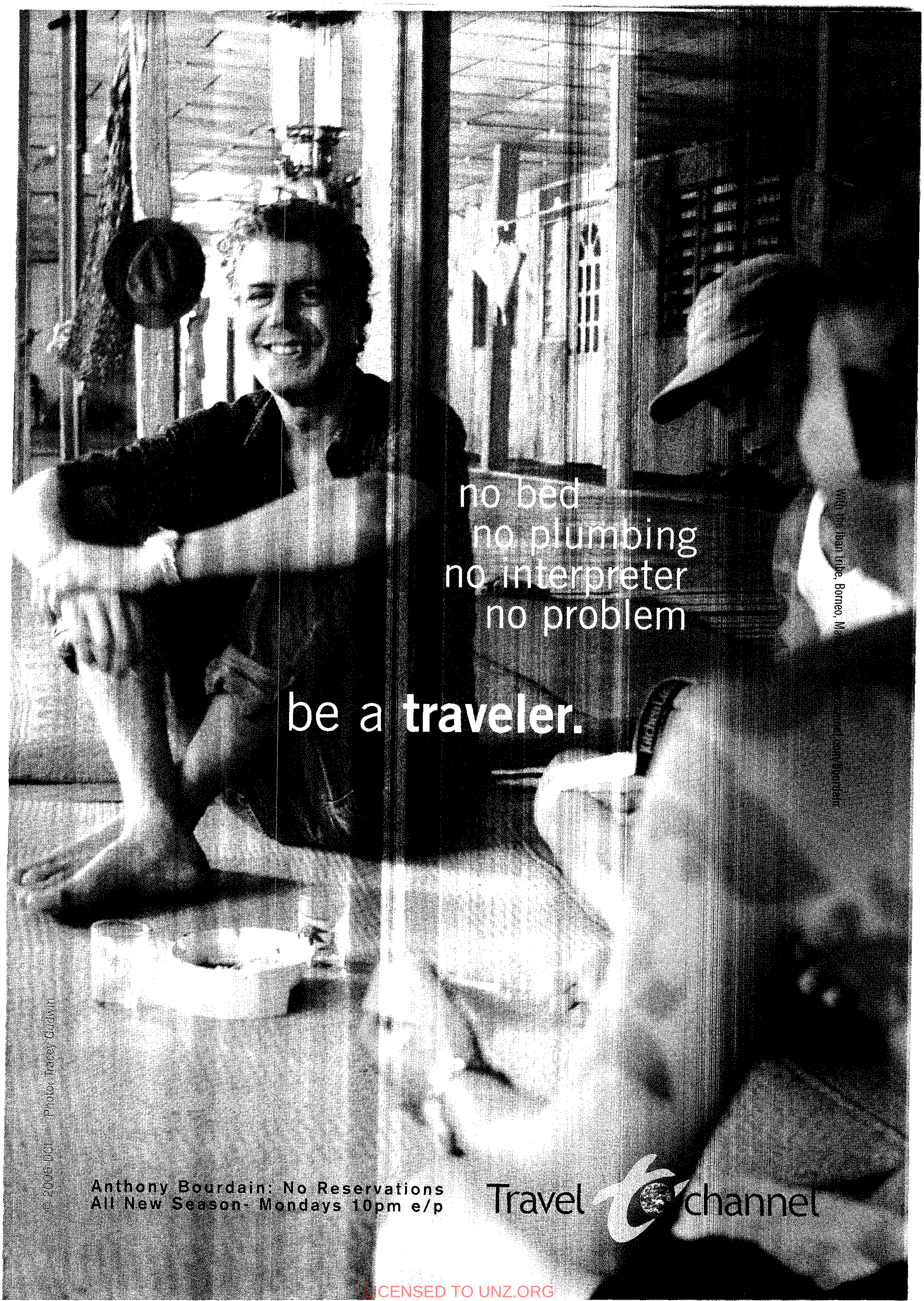
V FOR VENDETTA

A dunderheaded pop fantasia that celebrates terrorism and destruction. The graphic-novel creators Alan Moore and David Lloyd conceived the material in the nineteen-eighties during the reign of Margaret Thatcher. Setting their work in 1997, they projected a fascist future for England and a rebel hero—a terrorist in a Guy Fawkes mask who blows up the Parliament buildings and the Prime Minister's residence. The producer, Joel Silver, and the Wachowskis, Larry and Andy, grafted references to the current condition of warfare and fear onto this template, lifting details out of Orwell's "1984" and a variety of pop myths. Hugo Weaving is the caped and masked man who kills and blows things up; Natalie Portman is the innocent who becomes his victim and his follower. The movie has some visual life to it, but it's so foolish that you come out shaking your head. Among other things, the ineptitude of "Vendetta" suggests that pop isn't a very good mode for political allegory. With Stephen Rea. Directed by the Wachowski brothers' protégé, James McTeigue.—*D.D.* (3/20/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BASIC INSTINCT 2: In wide release. **FAILURE TO LAUNCH:** In wide release. **THE HILLS HAVE EYES:** In wide release. **16 BLOCKS:** In wide release. **STAY ALIVE:** In wide release. **YANG BAN XI: THE 8 MODEL WORKS:** Film Forum.

KIM DEMARCO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Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. April 5-8: Scottish Film Festival (for listings, go to www.tartanweekny.com). ♦ April 11 at 6:30: New Australian short films. ♦ The films of BB Optics. April 5 at 8: Short films by Jennifer Montgomery, Amy Taubin, and Marjorie Keller. ♦ "Essential Cinema." April 7 at 8: Short-film program, including "The Andalusian Dog" (1928, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali; silent). ♦ April 8 at 6: Short films by Joseph Cornell, program one (1939-57). ♦ April 8 at 8: Short films by Joseph Cornell, program two (1955-57).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through April 25: "Shelley Winters vs. the Water." April 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "A Place in the Sun" (1951, George Stevens). ♦ April 11 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ Through April 26: "*Village Voice* Best of 2005." April 6 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Bashing" (2005, Masahiro Kobayashi; in Japanese). ♦ April 7 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Funny Ha Ha" (2003, Andrew Bujalski). ♦ April 8 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Intruder" (2004, Claire Denis; in French). ♦ April 9 at 4:30 and 7: "The Sun" (2005, Alexander Sokurov; in English and Japanese). ♦ Through April 24: "It Happened in Brooklyn" April 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "It Happened in Flatbush" (1942, Ray McCarey). The 6:50 show will be introduced by the Brooklyn historians John Manbeck and Joe Dorinson.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through April 13: The films of Don Siegel. April 5-6 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Coogan's Bluff" (1968). ♦ April 5-6 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Madigan" (1968). ♦ April 7-11 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Dirty Harry" (1971).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. April 7-9 at noon: "Drunken Angel" (1948, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." April 7-8: "Across 110th Street" (1972, Barry Shear). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." April 11 at 7:30: "Newsreel: Early Films," short films from the nineteen-sixties by the documentary collective Newsreel, presented by one of its members, Roz Payne, and others.

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-715-1258)—Through April 16: "Against the Tide: Rebels & Mavericks in Contemporary Japanese Film." All films are in Japanese. April 6 at 7:30: "Maison de Himiko" (2005, Isshin Inudo). ♦ April 7 at 6:15: "Wild Berries" (2003, Miwa Nishikawa). ♦ April 7 at 8:30: "Down the Drain" (1993, Shinobu Yaguchi). ♦ April 8 at 4 and April 11 at 8:45: "Kaza-hana" (2001, Shinji Somai). ♦ April 8 at 6:30: "Canary" (2004, Akihiko Shiota). ♦ April 9 at 4: "Yakuza Graveyard" (1976, Kinji Fukasaku). ♦ April 9 at 6: "Rikidozan: A Hero Extraordinary" (2004, Hae-sung Song). ♦ April 10 at 6:15: "The Owl" (2004, Kaneto Shindo). ♦ April 10 at 8:45: "Bullet Ballet" (1998, Shinya Tsukamoto). ♦ April 11 at 6:15: "Preparations for the Festival" (1975, Kazuo Kuroki).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through April 30: "Baseball and American Culture." April 5 at 6: "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg" (2003, Aviva Kempner). ♦ April 5 at 8: "The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings" (1976, John Badham). ♦ April 7 at 8:30: "Bull Durham" (1988, Ron Shelton). ♦ April 9 at 5:30: "A League of Their Own" (1992, Penny Marshall). ♦ April 10 at 8:30: "Cobb" (†). ♦ Through April 30: "Ziegler Film, Berlin." April 5 at 6:15: "The Call of the Toad" (2005, Robert Glinski; in German and Polish), introduced by the producer Regina Ziegler. ♦ April 5 at 8:30: "Erotic Tales" (1995-2003, Jos Stelling). ♦ April 6 at 6 and April 10 at 6: "Fabian" (1978, Wolf Gremm; in German). ♦ April 6 at 8:15 and April 8 at 6:15: "Rodina Means Home" (1991, Helga Reidemeister; in German and Russian). ♦ April 8 at 8:30: "The Rapoports—Our Three Lives" (2003, Sissi Hüetlin and Britta Wauer; in German and English). ♦ April 9 at 2: "A Year of the Quiet Sun" (Krzysztof Zanussi; in English and Polish). ♦ April 9 at 4:30: "Korczak" (1990, Andrzej Wajda; in Polish and German). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." April 6 at 8 and April 8 at 5: "Paris Awakens" (1991, Olivier Assayas; in French) and "Eponine" (1984, Michel Chion; in French). ♦ April 8 at 2 and 8: "Hotel Atithi" (2005, Assayas and Luc Barnier) and "Sonic Youth: 1991—The Year Punk Broke" (1992, Dave Markey). ♦ Through April 19: "Edvard Munch and His Time." April 9 at 2: "Edvard Munch" (1976, Peter Watkins; in Norwegian). ♦ April 10 at 6: "A Doll's House" (1973, Joseph Losey), and home movies by Munch (c. 1927). ♦ April 10 at 8:15: "Nora Helmer" (1973, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German).

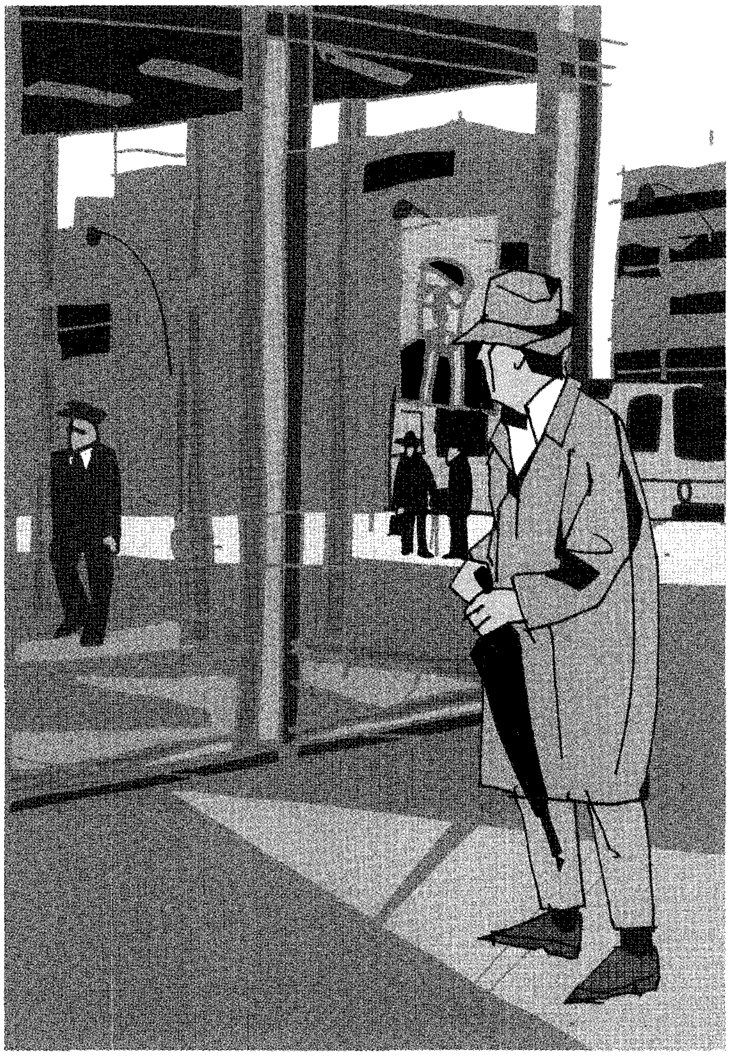
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—In revival. April 7 at 7:30 and April 8-9 at 6:30: "Playtime" (1967, Jacques Tati; in French, English, and German). ♦ April 8-9 at 2: "Daughter of Shanghai" (1937, Robert Florey). ♦ April 8 at 4:30: "King of Chinatown" (1939, Nick Grinde), introduced by Judy Wu. ♦ April 9 at 4:30: "Dangerous to Know" (1938, Robert Florey).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Special screenings. April 5 at 7: "Chicken Tikka Masala" (2005, Harmage Singh Kalirai) and "Ping Pong Love" (2004, Bo Mehrad). ♦ April 5 at 9, April 7 at 7, and April 8-9 at 5: "Toro Negro" (Pedro González Rubio and Carlos Armella; in Spanish). ♦ April 6-11 at 9: "Quality of Life" (2004, Benjamin Morgan). ♦ April 7 at 11: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ April 8 at 11: "Ramones: End of the Century" (2003, Jim Fields and Michael Gramaglia). ♦ April 9 at 7: "Tricky Women," a short-film program. ♦ April 10 at 7: "Abominable" (2005, Ryan Schifrin). ♦ Films from Croatia. April 6 at 7: "A Happy Child" (2003, Igor Mirković; in Croatian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." April 7-8: "Cremaster," parts 4 and 5 (1995/1997, Matthew Barney).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Special screenings. April 9 at 3 and April 11 at 4:30: "Aguirre: The Wrath of God" (†). ♦ April 9 at 5:30 and April 11 at 7: "Why We Fight" (2005, Eugene Jarecki).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through April 23: "A Road Map of the Soul," the complete films of Krzysztof Kieślowski. All films are in Polish except where noted. April 5 at 1:30 and 9:15: Student shorts and early documentaries (1966-71). ♦ April 5 at 3:15 and April 6 at 7: "Between Wroclaw and Zielona Gora" (1972) and "Workers '71: Nothing About Us Without Us" (1972). ♦ April 5 at 5 and April 7 at 7:20: "The Calm" (1976) and "From the Point of View of the Night Porter" (1977). ♦ April 5 at 7: "The Double Life of Véronique" (†). ♦ April 6 at 1 and April 10 at 8:30: "Factory" (1970), "Refrain" (1972), "Bricklayer" (1973), and "First Love" (1974). ♦ April 6 at 2:45 and 8:45 and April 11 at 9: "X-Ray" (1974), "Underground Passage" (1973), and "Curriculum Vitae" (1975). ♦ April 6 at 4:45 and April 11 at 3:45: "The Scar" (1976) and "Slate" (1976). ♦ April 7 at 1, April 8 at 4:15, and April 10 at 3:45: "Personnel" (1975) and "Hospital" (1977). ♦ April 7 at 3 and 9:15: "Camera Buff" (1979). ♦ April 7 at 5:15 and April 9 at 3:30: "A Short Working Day" (1981) and "Seven Women of Different Ages" (1978). ♦ April 8 at 6:15: "No End" (1984). ♦ April 8 at 8:30: "Blind Chance" (1981). ♦ April 9 at 5:30: "Three Colors: Blue" (1993; in French, Romanian, and Polish). ♦ April 9 at 7:30: "Three Colors: White" (1993; in Polish, French, and English). ♦ April 9 at 9:20: "Three Colors: Red" (1994; in French). ♦ April 10 at 1:30: "Decalogue," parts one and two. ♦ April 11 at 1:30: "Decalogue," parts three and four. ♦ Roundtable discussion. April 9 at 1: See Readings and Talks for details.



"Playtime," Jacques Tati's urban-modernist satire, at Moving Image.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

READINGS AND TALKS

"SCOTTISH POETRY NIGHT"
The Poetry Society of America presents Alastair Reid, Liz Lochhead, Janice Galloway, and James Robertson, who will read their favorite poems from their homeland. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. For more information, call 212-254-9628. April 5 at 7:30.)

EDWARD SOREL
The illustrator and *New Yorker* contributor's new book, "Literary Lives," is a gossipy look at ten major authors, including Tolstoy, Sartre, Jung, and Hellman. On April 6 at 6, he discusses the work that went into creating it. (The Corner Bookstore, Madison Ave. at 93rd St. 212-831-3554.)

JOHN ASHBERY FESTIVAL
The New School has organized a three-day tribute to the New York School poet. Highlights include a group reading of his work by a slew of mostly local poets, on April 6 at 7:30, and a solo reading by the poet himself, on April 7 at 7:30. (66 W. 12th St. For more information, visit www.newschool.edu/publicprograms. April 6-8.)

"WORKING WITH KIEŚLOWSKI"
In conjunction with the Film Society of Lincoln Center's ongoing retrospective, Annette Insdorf, the author of "Double Lives, Second Chances: The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski," talks with a few of the director's collaborators: the screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz, the producer Marin Karmitz, and the actress Julie Delpy. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5600. April 9 at 1.)

"CARTOONISTS IN CONVERSATION"
The longtime *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress interviews his colleagues Ed Koren and Barbara Smaller. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-601-1000. April 9 at 4.)

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
Four critics who also write poetry—Adam Kirsch, Meghan O'Rourke, Stephen Burt, and David Orr—discuss their double lives. The evening is moderated by the poet Deborah Garrison, who is also the poetry editor at Knopf. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. April 10 at 7.)

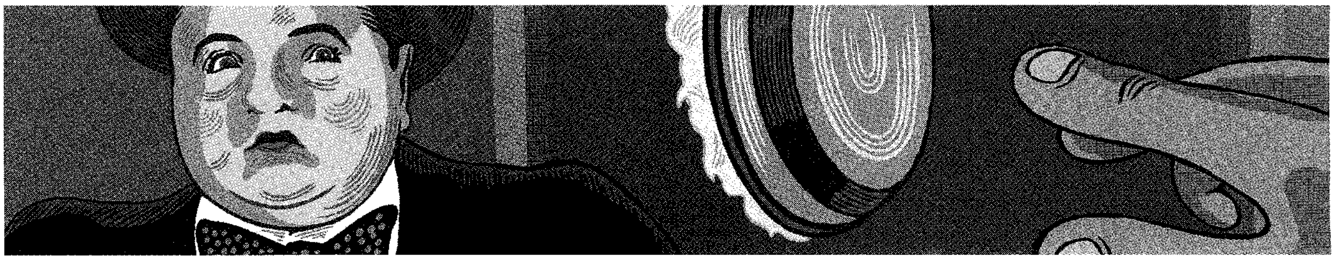
VERLYN KLINKENBORG
The author of "The Rural Life" reads from his latest work, "Timothy; or, Notes of an Abject Reptile," which takes the point of view of an eighteenth-century tortoise. (American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 77th St. 212-769-5100. April 11 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY
The Greatest Show on Earth continues at Madison Square Garden, complete with elephants, clowns, and acrobats, through April 17. (212-307-7171.)

TARTAN WEEK
Scots have had a glorious history in New York City. A number served as governors during the Colonial period, and others went on to start newspapers and banks and to bring the region its first golf course, but perhaps the most noteworthy accomplishment by a New York Scot took place in 1951, when Bobby Thompson, who was born in Glasgow, won the National League pennant for the Giants with his home run. The city held its first Tartan Day in 1999, and that celebration has since grown into a week of activities, including literary events (see Readings and Talks), a fashion show (expect kilts), musical performances, an art exhibit, and a parade up Sixth Avenue, on April 8. (For more information, visit www.tartanweekny.com. April 1-8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Turner was one of countless Englishmen transfixed by Venice's charms; his painting "Giudecca, la Donna Della Salute and San Giorgio," the highlight of **Christie's** largest-ever Old Masters sale (April 6), shows how the city's liquid lines and glimmering light infused the Master's oil painting with a soft-edged, almost watercolor iridescence. Expected to fetch more than twice the previous record for a Turner at auction, it is offered alongside lush works by Cranach, Van Dyck, and Carlevarijs. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000. Note: In advance of its auction of postwar and contemporary art, the house has put a historic selection of sculptures by Donald Judd on public view on the twentieth floor of 1230 Sixth Avenue through May 9, the day of the sale.) ♦ **Sotheby's** is also in a British mood, with its two-day "Celebration of the English Country House" (April 5-6), offering silver, Chinese export porcelain, clocks, and furniture. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Each outfit at the semi-annual vintage couture sale at **Doyle** (April 11) conjures up a lost world, from modish parties filled with wide-eyed Twiggy look-alikes (a white plastic-coated crinkled-paper mini tent dress trimmed with giant red plastic pompoms) to the oppressive parlors of Henry James (a young lady's high-necked smocked bodice by Liberty & Co., with a twenty-three-inch waist). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ On April 8, **Phillips** holds one of its new "Saturday@Phillips" sales, an assortment of moderately priced furniture, photographs, and jewelry meant to attract young, hip collectors. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)


MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
COUCH CULTURE
April 20

Manhattan Theatre Club presents "Shining City," a new play by Conor McPherson, in which a tormented man living an isolated existence (Oliver Platt) struggles to connect with his therapist (Brían F. O'Byrne). Martha Plimpton also stars. Robert Falls, the artistic director of Chicago's Goodman Theatre and the director of the Tony winners "Long Day's Journey Into Night" and "Death of a Salesman," directs. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
TEARS OF A CLOWN
April 20-May 15

Roscoe (Fatty) Arbuckle, a cantankerous comic with a permanent sneer, starred in and directed dozens of acclaimed slapstick films in the nineteen-teens and was his friend Buster Keaton's first director. His career was destroyed in 1921 by false charges of rape and murder, but he continued to direct, under a pseudonym, and was making a comeback in 1933, when he died. MOMA presents a dozen programs featuring much of Arbuckle's surviving work as an actor and a director. (212-708-9480.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BRAVO, DMITRI!
April 27-May 14

The members of the Emerson String Quartet bring their prodigious technique to music that they are very passionate about—the Shostakovich string quartets—in a five-concert series at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500.)

ART
MAGNIFIQUE
May 5-Aug. 19

More than a hundred collaborative works made in Paris in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be on view in "French Book Art/Livres d'Artistes: Artists and Poets in Dialogue," a show organized by the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, at the New York Public Library's Forty-second Street flagship. (212-869-8089.)

NIGHT LIFE
THE BAMBOOZLE
May 6-7

Last year, this little festival of emo, punk, and pop bands took over Asbury Park, New Jersey; this summer it moves to the Meadowlands. Fall Out Boy, Taking Back Sunday, and AFI lead the charge of more than eighty groups. (212-307-7171.)

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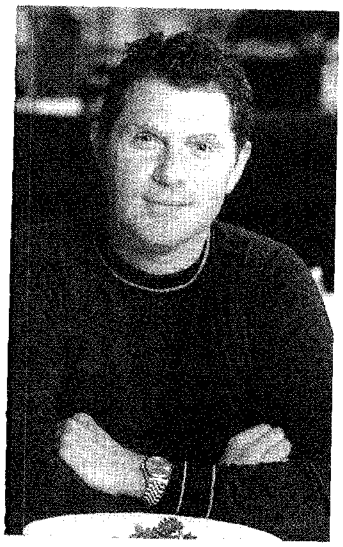

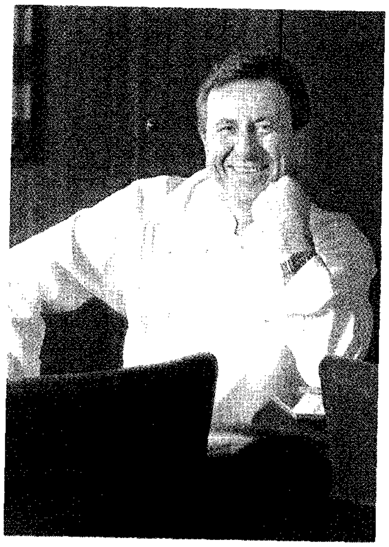

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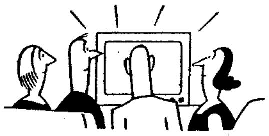
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ALIEN NATION

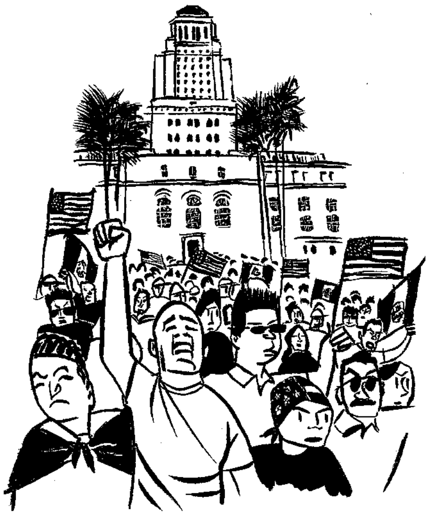


In a jaded and stage-managed political culture, it is rare to see the eruption of a genuine popular movement. That's what happened in Los Angeles the other week, when hundreds of thousands of people protested against congressional efforts to crack down on illegal aliens. The marchers, most of them Hispanic, set out from the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Broadway. By the time the stragglers reached City Hall, California had witnessed the biggest demonstration in its history.

Even more stunning was the sound of a once marginalized community finding its voice. For years, the immigration debate has been exercising politicians, economists, TV pundits, and editorial writers, not to mention the self-styled militia known as the Minutemen, which patrols the southern border. Here, finally, were the janitors, maids, dishwashers, babysitters, garment workers, office cleaners, shelf-stackers, busboys, cooks, gardeners, pool boys, and fruit pickers who do the work that American citizens generally won't do—at least, not at the wages being offered. Shedding their customary aversion to publicity, the immigrants lambasted the House of Representatives for approving a bill at the end of last year that would make living in the United States without a visa an "aggravated felony," impose heavy fines on firms that employ illegal aliens, and order the Department of Homeland Security to build a tall fence along sections of the Mexican border.

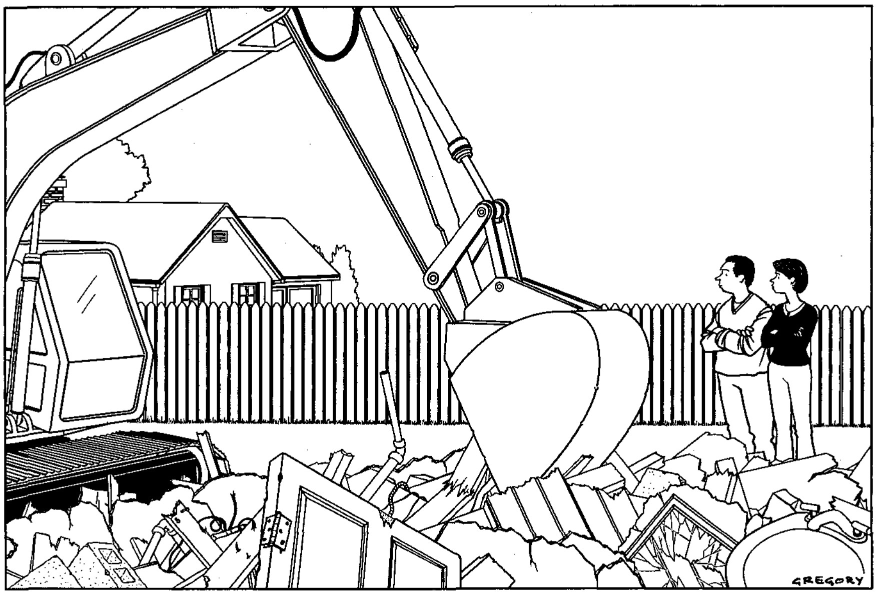
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

News of the demonstration spread across the world. Many commentators were heartened by the spectacle; an Irish newspaper saw "the face of a joyously multicultural America." Not everyone shared that view. On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly accused the demonstrators of intimidation. On talk radio, angry callers claimed that the marchers were "anti-American," citing the profusion of foreign flags and Spanish-language placards. In fact, many marchers were carrying American flags, some of which were emblazoned with pictures of family members serving in the United States military. (For young immigrants, the surest way to secure American citizenship is often to join the armed forces.) Other marchers brandished signs that said, "We love USA, too."



A few days after the L.A. protest, which followed similar events in Chicago, Miami, and other cities, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved a proposal that was much friendlier to illegal aliens than the House version. The new measure would give illegal workers the opportunity to apply for work visas, green cards, and, eventually, American citizenship. It also would create an expanded guest-worker program, allowing four hundred thousand more people a year to enter the United States legally. (Under the current system, about eight hundred thousand immigrants arrive here legally every year; another half million or so arrive illegally.) Although the new Judiciary Committee proposal has the tacit support of the White House, Senate Republicans remain split. Six Republicans on the Judiciary Committee voted against the proposal. In the full Senate, and in the House-Senate conference, which will attempt to reconcile the House and Senate bills, the proposal will encounter conservatives who favor a batten-down-the-hatches policy.

For some Republicans, especially those facing midterm elections in predominantly white districts, acting tough on immigration has certain diversionary advantages. "Would I rather be talking about immigration reform with these



"I agree, the place was a tear-down, but I just remembered we were only renting it."

voters or the war?" the Republican pollster Tony Fabrizio said to Ruth Marcus, of the Washington *Post*. "Immigration reform or gasoline prices?" Other immigration hawks have more substantive points to make. At a time when the federal government is spending hundreds of billions of dollars on the war on terror, it hardly makes sense to have such porous borders.

There are also legitimate questions about the economic impact of illegal immigration. Academic studies suggest that the presence of so many illegal immigrants—an estimated twelve million—depresses the wages of poorly educated Americans, who face more intense competition for menial jobs. Still, the vast majority of Americans don't compete for work with illegal immigrants. And the studies count only the effects of immigration that can be readily measured, such as the losses to workers from lower wages. They don't take into account long-term gains like a broader tax base, more investment, and an influx of entrepreneurial talent. Silicon Valley, for instance, is home to tens of thousands of Indian engineers, and it badly needs more. Google was co-founded by a Russian immigrant, Sergey Brin; your iPod was designed by Jonathan Ive, from London. The New Economy is, in no small part, an immigrant story.

Brin and Ive came here legally, but, even when it comes to undocumented aliens, there's reason to doubt the alarmist warnings about their coalescence into a permanent underclass. In California, an increasing number of Mexicans get identity cards from their government, which allow them to apply for U.S. bank accounts, credit cards, and mortgages, and to obtain a tax-identification number from the I.R.S. Many neighborhoods in cities like Los Angeles now have a property-owning, tax-paying middle class of illegal aliens.

New research by the Berkeley economist David Card confirms that recent immigrants are assimilating pretty well. Card looked at the experience of immigrant families in the past four decades, and found that, on average, the children of immigrants have higher education and income levels than the children of non-immigrants. Meanwhile, the children of the least educated immigrants have pulled almost even with the children of natives.

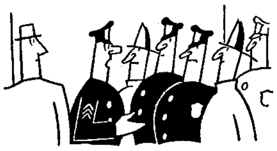
Over the course of its history, the United States has gained enormously from its image as an open society: open to new commodities, open to new ideas, open to new people. President Bush, to his credit, regularly defends this tradition, and urges voters to reject the rival tradition of insularity and isolationism. "No one should play on people's fears, or try to pit neighbors against each other," Bush said at a recent ceremony where thirty immigrants received American citizenship.

If it weren't an election year, the makings of a sensible compromise would be obvious. Hire more border guards, both to enhance security and to put some limit on the influx of cheap labor. Relax restrictions on educated foreigners whose expertise we need. (In 2004, the Department of Labor approved more than six hundred thousand requests for high-tech-worker visas; Congress, however, limits the number to sixty-five thousand.) And, finally, do right by resident illegals—many of them with American children, many of them already paying U.S. taxes.

It's possible that enough Republicans in Congress will support such a bill to make it law. Nativist efforts to take on immigration can backfire, as Pat Buchanan and Pete Wilson discovered. Some Republican strategists look at the marchers in Los Angeles and see a voting bloc that makes up about an eighth of the population and, by 2045, will represent nearly a quarter of it. In California, Florida, Arizona, and Nevada, Hispanics are already the swing voters. Although traditionally regarded as Democratic supporters, an estimated forty-four per cent of them voted for Bush in 2004. "We can't afford to do to the Hispanics what we did to the Roman Catholics in the late nineteenth century: tell them we don't like them and lose their vote for a hundred years," Grover Norquist, a Republican activist who is close to the White House, said. For once, good policy might coincide with good politics.

—*John Cassidy*

VISITING DIGNITARIES
POPE PROTECTOR



The chief of the world's oldest and smallest army, Comandante Elmar Theodor Maeder, arrived last week for a reception at the Union League Club, without the royal-blue-and-marigold-yellow striped knickers suit for which his regiment, the Papal Swiss Guard, is best known. (His hosts had asked him to wear the outfit, but he chose to leave it in Rome.) He wore a jacket and tie, with no hat or plumed helmet. A pin bearing the American and Vatican flags was affixed to his lapel. Maeder is a tall man with a sturdy chin and the countenance of a hockey player. When he says, with a sly grin, that his charges—halberdiers—are "not all choirboys," it is easy to imagine forceful interrogations being conducted behind closed doors in the basement of St. Peter's Basilica. (What he really means is that they have eyes for the Italian girls.)

Among those who had gathered to welcome Comandante Maeder, and to celebrate the Guard's five-hundredth year of active military service, was Cardinal Edward Egan, the Archbishop of New York. Egan couldn't stay long, but he fondly recalled attending the weddings of many Swiss guardsmen when he lived in Rome. "I don't think it's really seen as a defense force," he said of the Guard.

That depends on whom you ask. Maeder and Robert Royal, according to the party's invitation, were to speak about "the transformation of an ancient army into an élite special-forces unit highly trained to provide security to the Pope in a post-September 11 world." Royal is the author of a new book, "The Pope's Army: 500 Years of the Papal Swiss Guard." He stood and addressed the crowd, noting that during the sack of Rome, in 1527, nearly a hundred and fifty guardsmen gave their lives to protect Pope Clement VII. "That explains to us that, from the very beginning, this is a military belonging to the Vatican," he said.

Today, the force is a hundred and ten men strong. All recruits must stand at least five feet eight inches tall, be Swiss citizens, and, according to Royal, possess a rigor of spirit known as "the Swiss mentality." They live in barracks, like regular troops, and attend basic training, in addition to taking karate and judo lessons. (The Swiss mantra: Defense first!) Unlike regular troops, they must also be practicing Catholics, and they are required to study Italian. They are rumored to have developed a psychological technique that is effective in quelling itches. (They are often obliged to stand still for long periods.) The question they are most frequently asked is "How do you get to the Sistine Chapel?"

Only the most experienced among the guards travel abroad with His Holiness (in plain clothes), and in those cases the responsibility for protection, strictly speaking, belongs to the host country. "We know when to say, 'Now he's tired, move him along,' and whether or not he likes to do the handshakes," Maeder said.

Maeder made some brief remarks ("I read some years ago in a magazine that the Swiss Guard brought the potato from Italy to Switzerland . . . ") and, afterward, answered questions. A couple of military buffs, Dan and Ed, approached him. "What rifle do you use now?" Dan asked.

"A SIG," Maeder said.

Dan and Ed were aficionados of the Schmidt-Rubin K31, a "straight-pull" rifle that the Swiss Army stopped using in 1958. "It's a marvellous arm," Ed said.

"It's an example of a truly defensive arm," Dan said. "It's high-quality, and can hit things from far away: typical of Switzerland."

Maeder said that his guards, though equipped with guns, rarely lift them. "The oldest Swiss Guard that I know cannot tell me any stories about Swiss Guards needing to use their rifles in service," he said. "We are all equipped with pepper spray. But in my eight years serving, only once did I hear that a guard had to use his pepper spray."

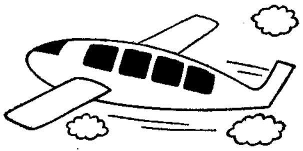
Faith Whittlesey, the Ambassador to Switzerland under Ronald Reagan, is a longtime champion of the Swiss Guard. "The Swiss are still the best marksmen in the world," she said. "Did you know that the No. 1 sport in Switzerland is not skiing, it's shooting? Pop, pop, pop! Our Second Amendment comes from the Swiss. And it's not to go hunting but to fight tyrants, as a militia."

A woman approached Maeder and asked if he had the authority to make battlefield commands without reporting first to a superior in Bern. "We are autonomous," Maeder said. "Our commander-in-chief is the Pope."

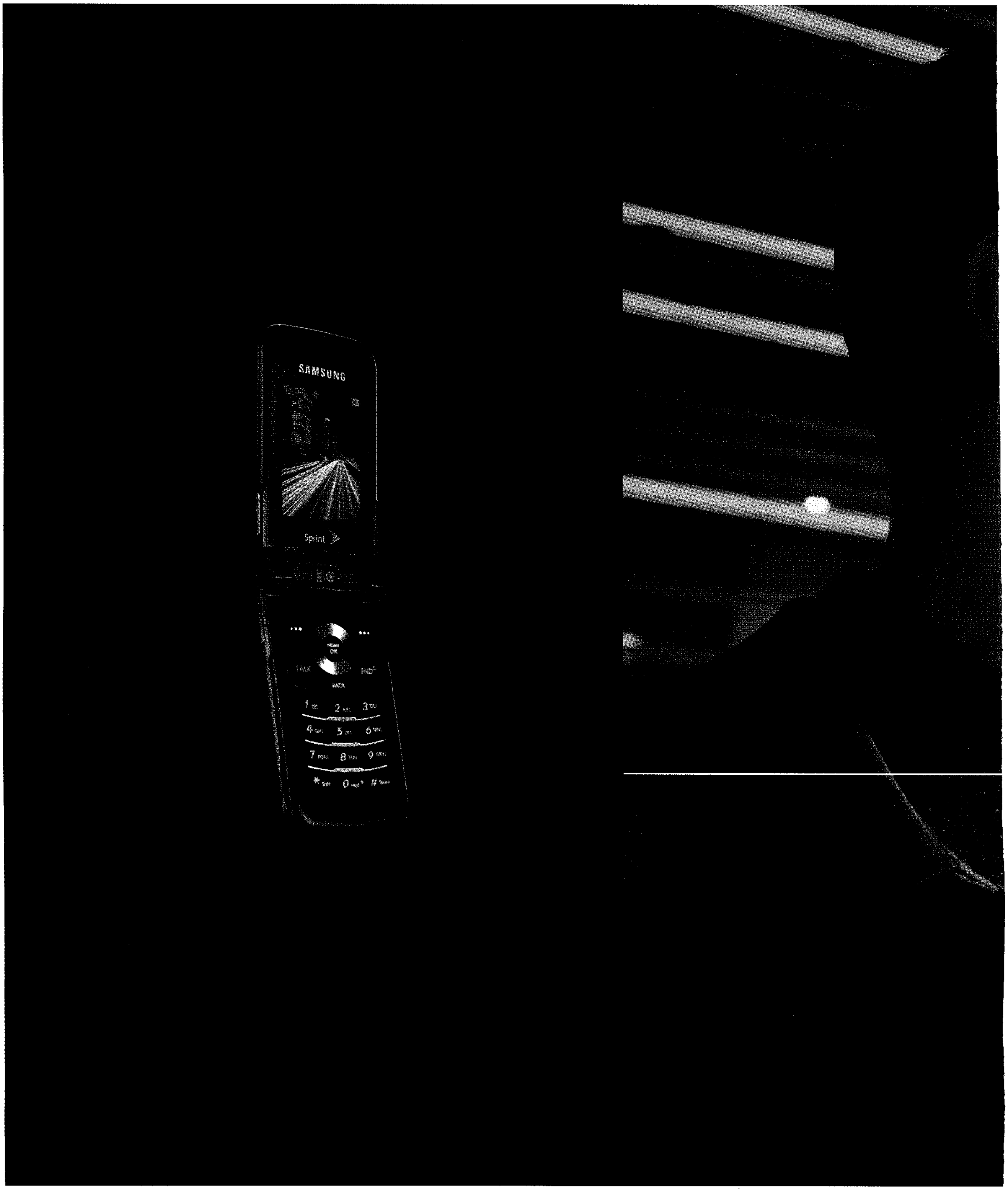
—Ben McGrath

FRIENDLY SKIES DEPT.

PEANUTS, MADAM?



When you sign up online for Skywards, which is the frequent-flier program of Emirates, the international airline of the United Arab Emirates, you enter your name, address, passport number, and other information, and you select an honorific for yourself from a drop-down list. A few of the choices, in addition to the standard Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss, and Dr, are: Admiral, Air Comm, Air Marshal, Al-Haj (denoting a Muslim who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca), Archbishop, Archdeacon, Baron, Baroness, Colonel, Commander, Corporal, Count, Countess, Dame, Deacon, Deaconess, Deshamanya (a title conferred on eminent Sri Lankans), Dowager (for a British widow whose social status derives from that of her late husband, properly used in combination with a second honorific, such as Duchess), Duchess, Duke, Earl, Father, Frau, General, Governor, HRH, Hon, Hon Lady, Hon Professor, JP (justice of the peace?), Judge, Khun (the Thai all-purpose honorific, used for both men and women), L Cpl, Lt, Lt Cmdr, Lt Col, Lt Gen, Midshipman, Mlle, Monsieur, Monsignor, Mother, Pastor, Petty Officer, Professor, Senor, Senora, Seno-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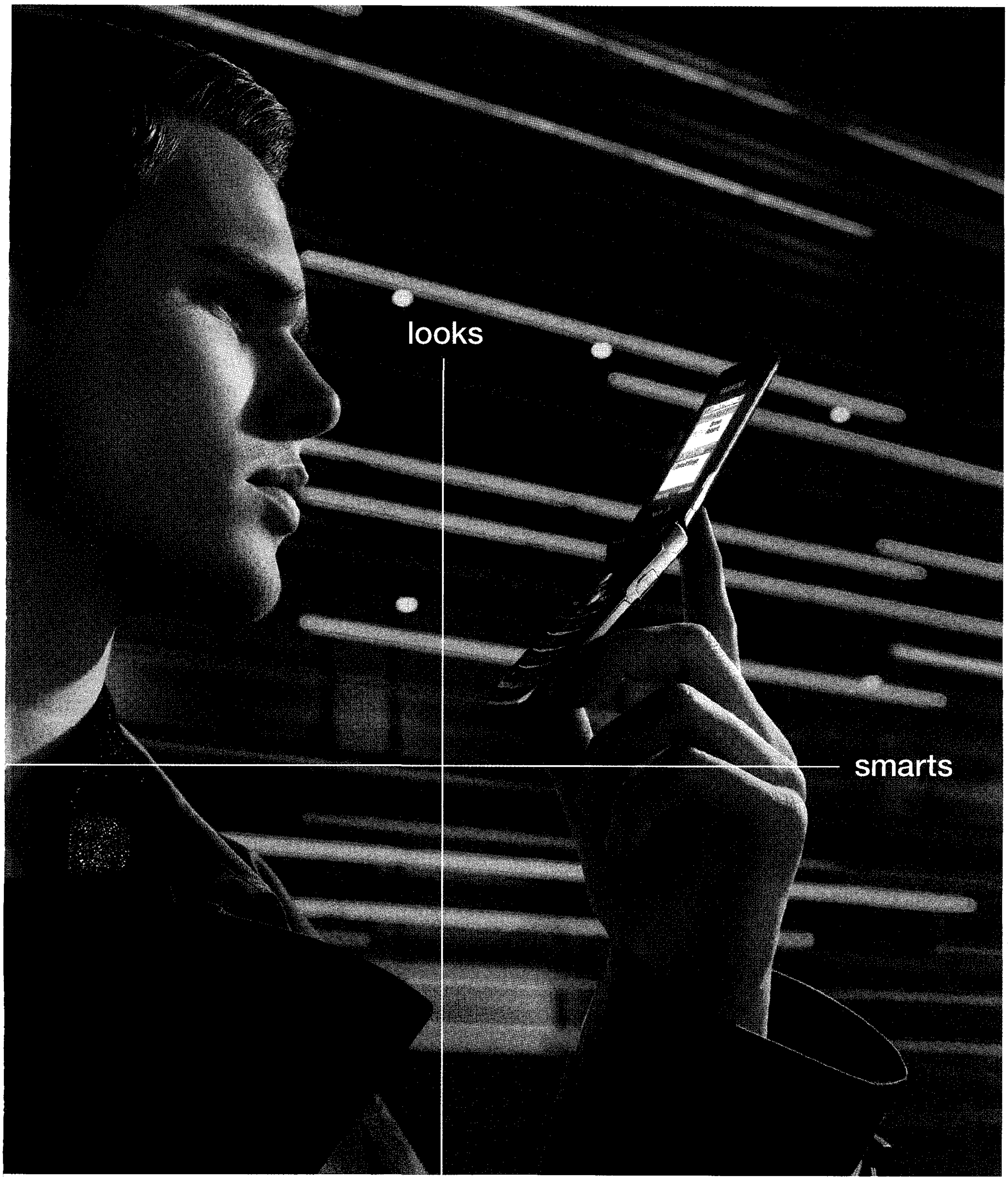

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rita, Sgt, Sgt Mjr, Shaikha (for a female shaikh, or sheikh), Sheikh, Shriman (an Indian honorific, for one blessed by Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, wisdom, luck, and other good things), Sister, Sqdn Ldr, Sqn Ldr, Sub Lt, Sultan, Swami, The Countess, The Dowager, The Duchess, The Marquis, The Matron, The Rev Canon, the Reverend, The Rt Hon, The Ven, The Very Revd, Ven, Ven Dr, Very Revd, Vice Admiral, Viscount, and Viscountess.

Anyone who chooses King obviously goes in first class, Private in economy, Wing Cmdr in an exit row. But what about Cardinal? Does he belong in first class (by virtue of his position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy), economy (for doctrinal seemliness), or business (a possible compromise)? Are Prince and Princess the business-class versions of The Prince and The Princess, or do all royals automatically belong in first? If you accumulate enough miles for a cabin upgrade, do you get a title upgrade, too? And if you're just a Representative (or a Member of Parliament), rather than a Senator (or a Lord), what are you supposed to do? Fly Delta?

One thing is clear: the list must have been compiled by a retired British military man now employed by a peer or peeress who has strong ties to the Church of England. About sixty per cent of the available titles are British military ranks, or flavors of British aristocrat, gentleman, or Protestant clergyman—that is, unless Hon is meant as the traditional title of respect bestowed on members of both sexes by waitresses in the Midwest. Surprisingly few Islamic or Arabic honorifics are available, given the provenance of the airline. Rabbi is offered, but not Imam—although if you select Rabbi you do so at your peril, since people whose passports bear Israeli stamps may be denied entry to the U.A.E.

A lesson to be learned from the Skywards form is that attempts at exhaustiveness are inherently self-defeating: the longer a list, the more conspicuous its lacunae. Queen is not offered (although Mayoress is), and you can be His (but not Her) Highness, His (but not Her) Honour, Marquis but not Marquise—omissions that suggest retribution for past affronts, or, conceivably, punishment for unacceptable behavior on previous flights.

The corporate headquarters of Emirates is in Dubai, which is also the home of Dubai Ports World, the company whose British subsidiary, Congress has decided, should no longer be allowed to manage six major American ports. Those who similarly feel disinclined to earn travel premiums from foreign powers with Arabic-speaking rulers will be relieved, perhaps, to know that Guest Rewards, which is the frequent-traveller program of Amtrak, also has an online application form with an extensive drop-down list of honorifics. The Amtrak list isn't as long as the one offered by Emirates, but it does include several titles that the latter doesn't, among them Chief Petty Officer, Chief Warrant Officer 4, Master Chief, and Senior Chief. It also has an appealing feature that Skywards lacks: a drop-down list of suffixes. If you do a lot of domestic travelling by train and happen, for example, to be the great-great-great-grandson of the character on "Gilligan's Island" who was portrayed by the late Jim Backus, you can enroll yourself in Guest Rewards, and very possibly nowhere else, as Thurston Howell VIII.

—*David Owen*

PINUP DEPT.
WHIPPED AGAIN

Last spring, during the broadcast of the Preakness Stakes, Bob Costas interviewed Jerry Moss, the owner of Giacomo, the horse that had won the Kentucky Derby. He noted that Moss, along with the trumpeter and producer Herb Alpert, had founded A.&M. Records. Near the end of their conversation, Costas held up his old copy of an A.&M. classic, the 1965 Alpert album "Whipped Cream & Other Delights," which, as most American males Costas's age know all too well, featured on its cover a photograph of a young woman clad, rather meagerly, in what appeared to be whipped cream. Costas asked Moss the name of the model. Dolores, he said.

"All hail Dolores!" Costas exclaimed.

Alpert, who happened to be watching on TV, was moved. He decided to send Costas a poster of Dolores, *mit Schlag*, upon which he wrote, "Dear Bob, can't stop thinking about you. Love, Dolores."

It was a variation on a sentiment that decades ago fogged the minds of many young men, as they gazed at the album cover and attempted to ascribe personalized come-hitherhood to the woman staring back. In the picture, she sits holding the stem of a rose in her left hand, above which the inner portion of a bare breast protrudes from the foam. She is licking cream from the index finger of her right hand, and a dollop of the stuff rests atop her forehead, like a tiara. (This is the only real whipped cream in the shot. The rest is shaving cream.) The image still seems a little raunchy, in a home-movie kind of way, but in the virtually pornless atmosphere of the suburban mid-sixties it was—and we're relying on the testimony of our elders here—the pinnacle of allure. The Whipped Cream Girl, as she came to be known, helped make Alpert and his Tijuana Brass even more famous than his loungy arrangements, smooth trumpet work, and suave song production destined them to be. The album shot to No. 1 and stayed on the charts for more than three years. Alpert would say, when performing live, "Sorry, but I can't play the cover for you."

"When that record broke, Tijuana Brass was catapulted onto another planet," Alpert said the other day. Initially, he had reservations about the cover. "In 1965, to see an image like that I thought was maybe pushing it a little too far," he said. "I thought the censors would be down on it. But in 2006 it looks pretty darn tame."

Last month, a new version of the album was released: "Whipped Cream & Other Delights Re-Whipped." Various artists made remixes of the original songs, over which Alpert laid some new trumpet solos. It's slick stuff. But, with all due respect to Alpert, who is a serious cat with serious cred and, as of a few weeks ago, a spot in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the most momentous revision may well be the one made to the cover art. There's a new Dolores, whose name is Bree Condon. If you adjust for palette size (the CD jewel box having, sadly, a fraction the area of a record sleeve), the Re-Whipped Cream

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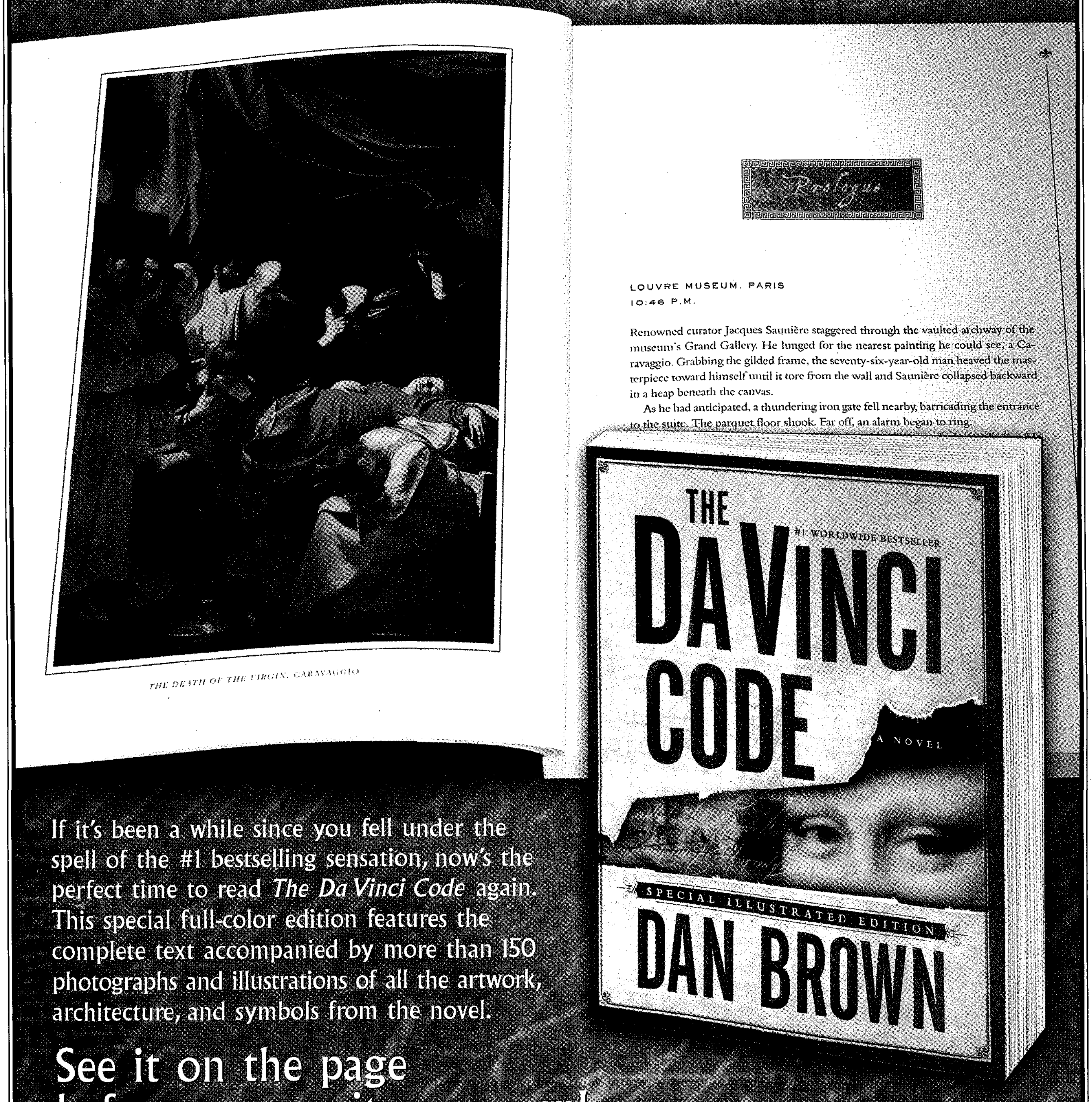

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As he had anticipated, a thundering iron gate fell nearby, barricading the entrance to the suite. The parquet floor shook. Far off, an alarm began to ring.

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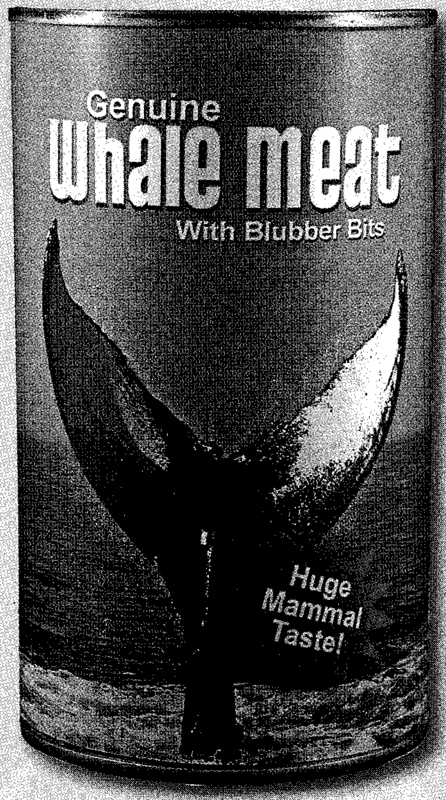
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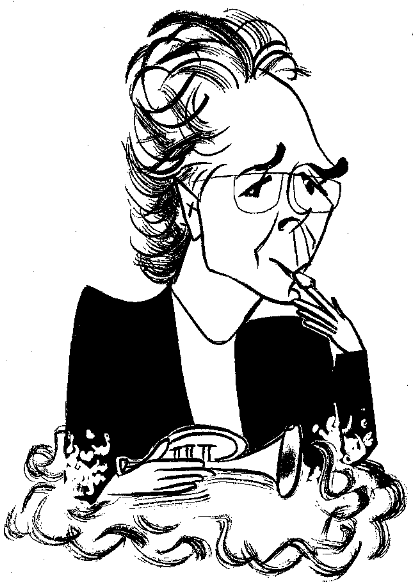
FishScam.com

Girl shows much more skin than her predecessor did. Bree is lying on her belly, in a strapless whipped-cream bikini, with not a splotch of cream (or a retouched pixel) out of place. Dolores, by contrast, looked as though she had emerged from a cream-pie fight—stray flecks everywhere. Even the whipped cream on Bree's index finger has been heavily styled; it resembles an impaled Martini olive. She reveals more, yet suggests less.

Alpert, who had to be talked into doing the remix, is fond of the new cover. "The girl is beautiful," he said. "I think it's a little more accessible. There's so much product in the stores these days that it doesn't hurt if your eye goes to something that has a little eye appeal."

Eye appeal, however, is near the top of Alpert's list of deleterious trends in popular music. "A lot of it is so corny," he said. "It looks like professional wrestling to me. These people dress up in their getups." He blames television: "People started listening with their eyes."

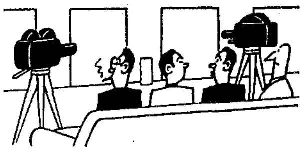


Herb Alpert

Another thing that bothers him is the tendency toward profligacy; he laments the scarcity of restraint and feeling, in jazz playing, at least, if not in edible-outfit design. (Just as there can be too much flesh, there can be too many notes.) "When Bill Clinton was inaugurated," Alpert said, "they had ten saxophone players at the party. It was mostly the young guns, but Gerry Mulligan was in there, too. Afterward, he called me and said, 'Man, you know, these young guys, they know all the modes, they know all the chords, they can play high and low and fast, and they can do amazing things, but the one thing they don't know how to do is leave the bone alone.' "

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE PICTURES
LAST LOOK



The other day, several men—a director, a screenwriter, a cinematographer, an editor, a type of technician called a color timer, and two producers—gathered in a screening room on an upper floor of a building in the West Fifties. The room had black walls, a reddish-brown carpet, and a movie screen the size of a very large bedsheet. Ido Mizrahy, the director of the film "Things That Hang from Trees," which was about to be shown at both Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art, in the New Directors/New Films series, had reserved the room in order to see his film one last time before delivering it to MOMA. Mizrahy, who is twenty-four, is tall and slim, with black hair, olive skin, and clear, dark eyes. He was a child actor in Israel, and, along with stage and television work, he dubbed Hebrew for Disney movies such as "Peter Pan." He came to New York six years ago.

The movie portrays the life of an eight-year-old boy in Florida, in 1969. He lives with his mother, who owns a lingerie store; she models in the store's front window. He is harassed by a bully and also by his father, a drifter. He is nearly mute in the face of his suffering, and only after a tragedy finds shelter. All the men in the room had ideas about other actors who might have been cast, about shots that might have been handled differently, about scenes that might be shed, but it was too late to change anything about them. The purpose of the screening was to verify that all the scenes were in focus and that there were no flaws or scratches in the print.

After the lights came up, the men gathered in groups, some of which dissolved and formed again. Their conversations overlapped, and they decided that one more print should be made, to correct a handful of flaws, before it went to MOMA.

"Every single time, it's different," Mizrahy said.

"The top of the frame . . ." one of the producers said.

"In the lower left-hand corner?" another asked.

The color timer would be making the new print. He shrugged and said, "By tomorrow afternoon, it shouldn't be a problem."

"What about the left side of the frame?" someone asked.

"A squiggly white line," Mizrahy said.

"In the lingerie shot," a producer said. "Where it's the camera's point of view."

"It's set that way," someone said.

"It's set that way?" the producer said. "O.K."

"The main thing is the weird focus," someone said. "We're not sure if it's happening just here, or when it was shot."

"It's projector problem," said the cinematographer, who is Croatian.

"But what about the vibration—is that normal?"

"I think the white is so bright that it's causing the vibration," the cinematographer said. "On bigger screen will be less." He went on, "I thought the skin tone was better."

"The balance was more consistent," Mizrahy said. "Originally, we were trying to make it look waxy, like a wax museum, but when everything went warmer they looked too healthy."

"You don't think it's too yellow?" someone asked.

"Which scene?"

"Back of the truck."

"It's more white than green, but there's still too much yellow."

"Maybe too orange."

A woman entered the room carrying a tray with a coffeepot and cups. She placed the tray on a table and left.

"My child is not as perfect as I wanted her to be," someone said.

"You're just obsessing."

"Yeah, yeah, no, I know."

One of the producers poured himself coffee. "Are we going to have another conversation?" he asked. He looked around. "Or no, this is it," he continued. "Because this room costs money."

"How much money?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Are you happy?" someone asked.

—*Alec Wilkinson*

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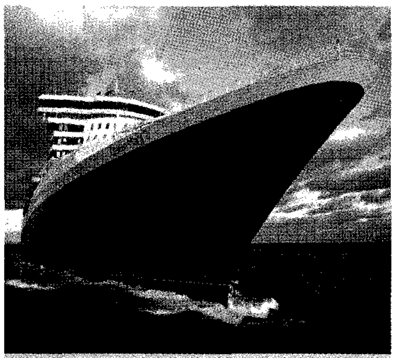

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NOTES OF A GASTRONOME

ON THE BAY

Building a better oyster.

BY BILL BUFORD

Mike Osinski was an acquaintance, someone I saw every now and then in the elevator of the Manhattan apartment building we'd both lived in for nearly ten years. Although I never knew what he did exactly (something in finance; he was always wearing a suit), he seemed different from the others—affable in a way I associate with people from the Southern states, less formal, with an unpretentious good-ol'-boyness. One day, I spotted Osinski walking his dog and realized I hadn't seen him for some time. He'd grown a graying goatee and was wearing baggy jeans and muddy work boots.

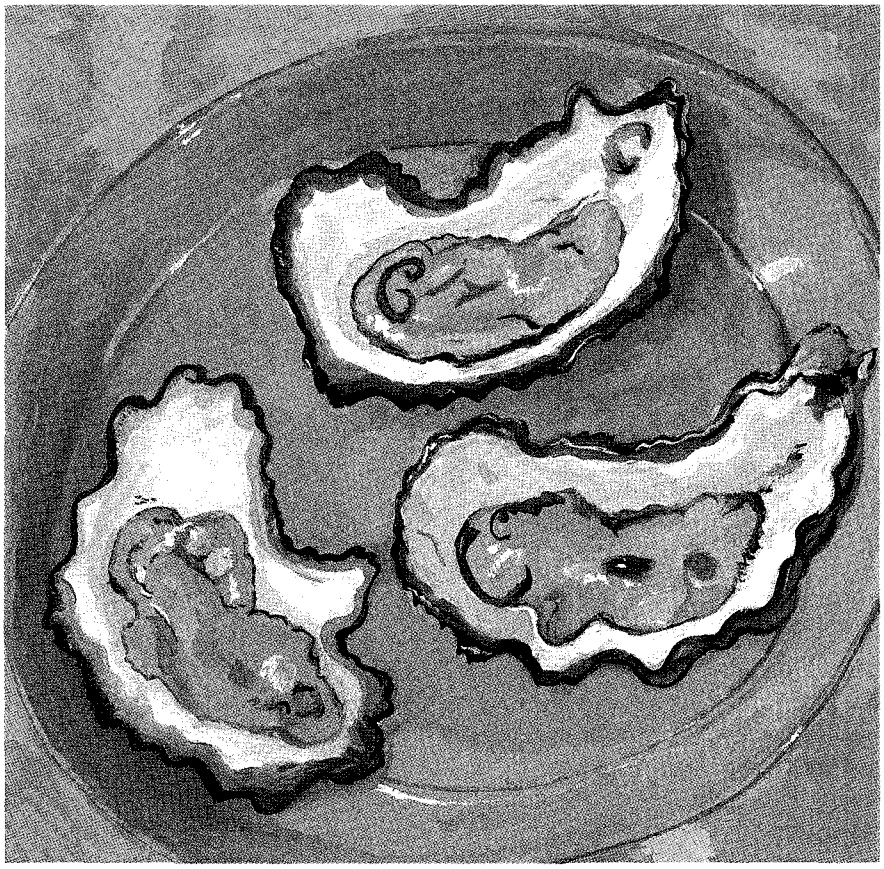
"I've left the city," he said. "I've given up the rat race!" He seemed giddy and made big gestures with his hands. He was now living in Greenport, a town on one of the far tines of Long Island's North Fork. "I'm working on the water! I'm a bayman!" (Baymen are the region's traditional seafood hunter-gatherers.) He motioned for me to step closer. "And I've lost thirty pounds." Osinski slapped himself to show off his abs. "Oysters did this. I harvest oysters. I'm a new man. The differences between men and women? Now I understand them. Do you know what I mean? I am a maaaaaaan!" He said the word "man" as though it should always have twelve syllables.

Osinski was born in 1954, and grew up in Mobile, Alabama, with a barefoot taste for the bounty of the intertidal beaches. (He was a youthful advocate of the Southerner's unspoken principle that, in the Gulf states, your identity is fed by what you pull out of the warm waters for dinner.) But Long Island isn't anything like the Gulf. I stared at my neighbor and thought, Oysters. Is that what happens when we get older—we take up hobbies?

I didn't see Osinski for another year, when I ran into him and his dog after a morning of deliveries. Gramercy Tavern had taken his oysters—"The chef says they're the best he's eaten in his life"—and other restaurants had followed: Esca, the Four Seasons, BLT Fish, Le Bernardin. These were some of the most respected eateries in the city. Le Bernardin was regarded by many as the best fish place in America. "And they love my oysters," Osinski said.

Greenport is a hundred miles from Manhattan, on the upper reaches of Peconic Bay, a fast-moving body of water squeezing between Shelter Island and the raggedy narrow end of New York on its way to the open sea. Osinski's home, built in the eighteen-thirties, probably by a whaling captain, sits on a sandy isthmus with views of water in two directions: in front, the Peconic; in back, a brackish inlet, fed by a creek and the bay's tides, called Widow's Hole, after one Margaret Leverage, the wife of the whaler. (He went to sea after completing the house, and never returned.) It was a mournful legacy, but one that Osinski nervously ended up drawing from.

On the East Coast, oysters derive their names from where they're found—they might be called a thousand things, but there is only one species, *Crassostrea virginica*. The names, therefore, can seem a little arbitrary, which was illustrated by a story told to me by Sandy Ingber, the chef at Grand Central's Oyster Bar, of the Pemaquid. "This Pemaquid—it was a good oyster," Ingber said. "But it didn't sell." Who knows why? The name had no magic or was difficult to pronounce. "So I started calling it a Bristol." Pemaquid is near Bristol, Maine. "I couldn't keep it on the menu." (Ingber has since gone back to calling it a Pemaquid.) By this logic, Osinski's oysters could be Peconics or Greenports, but he decided to invoke the pond behind his house and call them Widow's Holes, even though the name had some unwieldy implications: no eager, neo-oysterman really wants his shellfish to invoke mortality (Here, eat my raw shellfish and you, too, can make your wife a widow). On the other hand, what exactly is a widow's hole? "It sounds pornographic, doesn't it?" Osinski asked, as though it were the punch line to a dirty joke, not an entirely unhappy association for the world's most famous aphrodisiac. "Osinski's oysters are perfectly good," Ingber told me, "but my job is to move shellfish. Widow's Holes—that's a name I can move."



"Yes, I chew," one oyster farmer says. "If you swallow, all oysters are the same."

MAIRA KALMAN

The view from Osinski's home meets just about everyone's definition of picturesque, but on a cold December morning it was remarkably uninviting. The bay was gray. The sky was gray. The trees were black and bare. There seemed to be no horizon. Out on the water, an empty ferry was leaving for Shelter Island. Overhead, and in all directions, were formations of geese—they made me think of sergeants' stripes in Second World War movies—on their way to somewhere else. In the shallow water where Osinski kept a boat, skim ice had formed. I had offered to help out, and was given oyster gear to put on: bright-orange overalls called bib pants, a top called waterproof sleeves, some giant gloves (wet inside), and an extra-thick wool hat (also wet). But the bib pants were uncomfortably snug—I learned later that Osinski had grabbed the wrong pair and given me a pair belonging to Isabel, his wife, not a small woman but much, much smaller than me—and my breakfast constricted alarmingly when I walked outside, tipping side to side like a moonwalker, because I couldn't bend my knees.

I didn't know what it meant to harvest an oyster. I had images, probably from books, of people standing in a skiff, raking the bottom and lifting dislodged shellfish with "tongs," deftly maneuvered like giant chopsticks. My suspicion is that, in earlier times, everyone knew where and how they got their oysters, because in earlier times everyone seemed to eat them. The mystery of oysters today is why people stopped.

It happened fast. "For most of the twentieth century, most people in town were involved in shellfish," the mayor of Greenport, Dave Kapell, told me when I called him looking for explanations. "There were a dozen canneries, plus shuckers and washers and packers and a barrelmaking factory for the daily shipments to Fulton Fish Market. Discarded shells were everywhere, some in piles forty feet high, and always the stench of oyster tissue decomposing." According to Kapell, most of the waterfront was given over to shellfish. So was most of the water in front of the waterfront, a concept I didn't understand until I was shown a map from the fifties, a familiar enough graphic—small lots, big lots, a network of right angles—but unusual in this respect: the property was at the bottom of the bay. It is likely that Greenport underwater was more valuable than the town on land.

Today, the town is framed by the remains of two giant canneries—Lester & Toner Company, near Osinski's home, and the Long Island Oyster Company, on the other side of the bay, a gleaming white monster with what looked like Hellenic pillars. Both businesses went bankrupt in the sixties. Lester & Toner is now condominiums; the Hellenic pile is empty. What happened?

Overharvesting, according to Dave Relyea, an owner of Frank M. Flower & Sons, in Oyster Bay (started in 1887, "the last of the big boys"): people didn't know how to replace what they were taking out. And then pestilence (Dermo and MSX, parasites that mysteriously appeared in the fifties—no one knows from where). And predators (starfish, mainly, which arrived in the thirties and then again in the sixties, devouring whole bays). But people, principally. And pollution and the pervasive unease raised by the prospect of diseased shellfish. Oysters eat by filtering nutrients through their gills—a single oyster cleans about two gallons of water an hour—but their health corresponds to that of the water passing through them. Good water: good oysters. Bad water: bad oysters. Bad oysters: bad tummy ache, unless your oysters are really bad, in which case you have a really bad tummy ache. In Louisiana, where the fecund Gulf and the warm Mississippi encourage all kinds of growth—including the unique *Vibrio vulnificus*, a cousin of cholera—someone dies from oysters every year.

There were other factors. Osinski blames the Catholic Church ("If only everyone still ate fish on Fridays, I'd be rich"), an unlikely explanation but not without merit: people stopped eating oysters because they stopped knowing them. My Louisiana grandfather, for instance, a boomingly affable man (who also believed that if you're from the Gulf you eat the Gulf), had loved oysters—along with crawfish and shrimp, plus swamp items like catfish and possum—and devoured them with a voracious zeal, somehow finding something in the shellfish that confirmed his Southernness. My father, a more selective eater, didn't confuse identity with diet, and thought oysters were repellent. It takes only one generation to turn against a thing, and the next generation (mine) has no idea what it's missing. As a result, oysters today are mainly a nostalgia food, rarely eaten at home but served in restaurants by members of a staff we'd like to believe won't poison us. They are the very people Osinski sells to. Which was why I was accompanying him out into the freezing Peconic. Le Bernardin needed another two hundred.

Osinski's boat had dents and scratches, and was aggressively secondhand. The front was a mess. The sight conveyed disorder and reeked of dead seaweed and rotting fish. There were bags, plastic containers, pieces of wire, buckets, a proliferation of desiccated shells, and, somewhere, an anchor, which I eventually discovered when I was ordered to find it. (I waddled forward with great difficulty—I can't begin to describe the tidal pull that occurred when I bent over.) In the back, built up against the stern, were two platforms, like tables. This was where Osinski sorted his oysters. Le Bernardin insists on small oysters, no larger than three inches. "Women don't like the big ones," Osinski explained. "A frog waiter told me. It makes them uncomfortable."

Osinski learned that the land underwater could be owned when he took a course in oystering five years ago in nearby Southold. (It was taught by Kim Tetrault, a marine biologist of a highly romantic disposition, who seems determined single-handedly to revive the shellfish of the Peconic.) Most of the bay's underwater land now belongs to the state: you paid taxes on it like any other piece of property, but most people didn't. The previous owners of Osinski's property, though, had paid theirs, and Osinski turned out to own acres of underwater land. This was where we were now, about three hundred feet out, bobbing up and down in a higgledy-piggledy scattering of buoys.

Osinski grabbed one, wrapped the rope around a winch, and started cranking. Slowly, what looked like a giant chest emerged from the dark-gray bay, magnified by the water, getting bigger and bigger until it broke the surface, seaweed and sea creatures cascading off the sides. The boat tipped. It was a steel cage, about four feet in length and three feet high, and weighed nearly four hundred pounds. I helped Osinski pull it in and bring it to rest on the sorting table. He unlatched a hatch and pulled out a "purse," a mesh bag filled with oysters that spilled out like marbles, along with flip-floppy bluefish, many different kinds of crabs, and what looked like muddy seaweed (sea squirts, in fact, which obstruct the flow of water, an oyster's source of food, and need to be ripped out, a task I undertook with great vigor, trying to be useful, whereupon I discovered the origins of the name: my contact lenses browned over, the bay went momentarily opaque, and it was only on blinking, scratchily, that I saw how I had been covered with sea squirt). In the event, this wasn't the cage Osinski was hoping to find—the oysters had been there only since last spring and were two inches in length. By next September, they'd be "market size." (An oyster can grow two inches a year.)

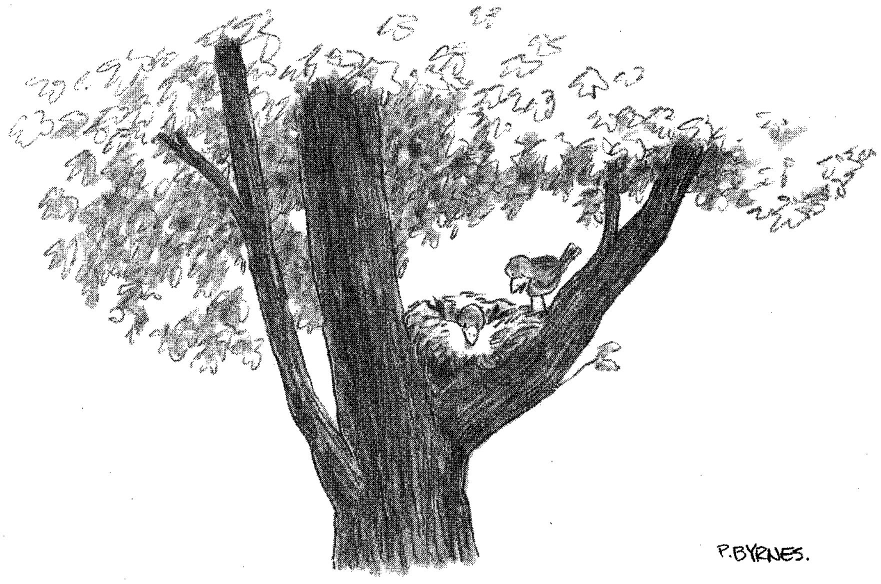
He hooked another buoy. This cage wasn't one he wanted, either. We pulled out another. He was looking for oysters from the previous year, two-year-olds, which should be Le Bernardin size.

"I know they're here somewhere." Osinski was muttering. He hooked another buoy, but the rope was tangled. "Jesus Christ," he said. "Who in the hell did that?" He yanked and pulled. Several cages appeared to have been stacked on top of each other. "Oh, I guess I did, didn't I?" And of course he had, because he was the only one working this patch of the Peconic.

The year before, Osinski had been out on Christmas Day. Le Bernardin was a new account, and he wasn't finding three-inch oysters for the busy New Year's week ahead. The inlet froze, and he had to keep plowing his boat through it, breaking the surface, to insure he could get back in. (Everyone, I learned, respects the mortal cold of this bay in the winter.) Even on the Peconic, ice formed. When Osinski returned, with thirty oysters for his efforts, his children—Susanna (then six) and Mercator (five)—were waiting for him, jumping up and down, oblivious of the implications that Daddy was not walking up from the dock with a festive bounce. It was late afternoon, and they wanted to know what Santa Claus had brought them.

"Oh, shut up. There is no goddam Santa Claus. Leave me alone." Osinski then went to bed. Later that week, he clandestinely bought someone else's oysters (a great lapse of conviction, as if, in his exhaustion, he'd lost his raison d'être and concluded that an oyster was an oyster was an oyster, after all). A chef phoned: "We don't know what happened, but these oysters are not what we thought we were buying. We're throwing them away."

This time, Osinski eventually found a



"I'm all for pushing them out of the nest, but maybe next time we could wait till they hatch."

cage of the appropriate-sized shellfish and sorted through the purse's take, filling up a sack for Le Bernardin, saving the larger ones for other restaurants, and putting the smaller ones back for next year—provided he could find them again. We'd been on the water five hours. The day had yielded a hundred and seventy oysters. Osinski gets seventy cents an oyster. That's a hundred and nineteen dollars.

Until recently, Osinski had been making much more money, hundreds of thousands a year ("I can't tell you—my neighbors hate me as it is"), but hadn't been doing what he wanted. His secret ambition had always been to be a writer—that, and to live by the sea. (His Web site includes poems about the Peconic, but nothing about the price of an oyster.) When he graduated from college (English literature at Florida State University), he got a job on a shrimping boat, seeming to realize one of his ambitions, but quit after the boat almost went under in a storm. Then he was hired as a reporter for a Florida newspaper called *Today*, near Cape Canaveral, but was, by his own self-denigrating account, too sloppy to be a journalist. In a story about a white sheriff, Osinski confused the name of a white community with the name of a black one. He was fired. He seemed always to be getting fired, owing to what I'm tempted to describe as his congenital messiness. In this respect, his disordered oyster boat was like his life. "I know, I know, soon you'll find me with a Coke machine in the garage and my pickup sitting out on bricks and a yard full of children." (In fact, the yard is full of the detritus of his new profession—cages and purses drying out in the sun—as well as a rusted red wagon, a broken broom, a basket of sweet potatoes, a stroller with a wheel missing, a giant plastic duck, a torn pink blanket, a traffic cone, a tricycle parked inside a shrub.) A career breakthrough came when, urgently needing money, he took a job as a computer programmer. He got fired from that one, too, but not before discovering that his affinity for numbers was protected by a computer's ability to self-correct. When I first met Osinski, he and a partner were writing a program affectionately called "the money tree" (it enabled banks to trade mortgages quickly and with a calculated risk). He made a lot of money for a lot of people, until he realized he didn't have to be in an office and got someone to buy the program. Then he was fired ("I don't know why—most people just don't like me"). He is now writing a novel of his new life—his life on the water.

My second trip to Greenport was the first day of winter. It was windy and cold—twenty-two degrees—but also bright and clear. This time, I had a horizon to look out onto—my mind, liberated by the sight, seemed to expand to the very edge—as well as a capacious pair of bib pants, also liberating. "It's the winter solstice!" I cried out. This big sky, the salty air. "What an ecstatic way to start a season!"

For Osinski, it was just another day on the bay. Dates didn't matter to him anymore, he said. "I don't pay attention. I know tide tables. I live by the phases of the moon and by watching the sea." I wasn't sure I believed him, but I recognized the philosophical point. He killed the engine, and we pulled up a cage. Once again, there weren't many oysters that were market size, although enough for an impromptu breakfast.

There was a shucking knife on a bench, like a butter knife with more edge. Osinski grabbed a towel to hold an oyster in place, so the liquid wouldn't tip out—the "liquor" is regarded by many as the most important ingredient in the experience of a shellfish—and gently pressed the blade against the hinge. Nothing happened. He pressed again: nothing. Typically, what I'd have done at this point was increase the pressure; rebuffed, I'd respond by raising the level of attack, but the result was never pretty. For Osinski, the operation was a negotiation. The blade in position, he wiggled it up and down gently. He seemed not to be prising open the shells but massaging the muscle that kept them closed. I thought, At any moment he's going to sing some soothing thing to coax the little fellow out. Then the muscle simply relaxed, and the shells separated.

"You don't chew, do you?" I asked. I was confirming what I knew to be the received practice. ("It's all about the mouth feel," Sandy Ingber had told me. "Slurp, never chew." But he admitted that he took a discreet bite when testing a new product.)

"You tease it," Osinski said, "you work it with your tongue. But you'd never sink your teeth into it. Goodness, no!" I watched. He slurped, swished, his cheek puffing out as the oyster, denuded of its shell only a few seconds before, was knocked around inside his mouth until it went down, and I found myself marvelling at the speed with which a creature can be transported from ocean to stomach, dispatched from the dark and deep to—well, the dark and deep. Osinski emitted a sigh of pleasure. "I feel so elemental when I eat oysters. All primitive cultures ate them. The prehistory of man is in the shells they left behind." He was alluding to what archeologists call middens, piles of shells, sometimes several acres across, believed to be thousands of years old, stacked up like dirty dishes (which in effect they were). They are described by Mark Kurlansky in his elegant history of New York, "The Big Oyster": the inside of an oyster shell is white like ivory, and piles of them, gleaming in the sun, were visible from great distances. "When I eat an oyster," Osinski declared, "I feel I'm connecting to something primordial."

It was my turn. I slurped and, before swallowing, remembered the instruction to play with my oyster-creature, and was then struck by an unexpected affinity between where I found myself and what was in my mouth. It was the briny intensity of what had crossed my palate: the food equivalent of the salty air. Whatever I was doing (I couldn't bring myself to call it eating) tasted absolutely of here—this spot on the Peconic.

Osinski opened more oysters. We ate them—or swallowed them, anyway—and sat studying the water and the million ways that a winter morning's sun was reflected on it. ("When I'm out here, I actually get quite metaphysical.") But I was left wondering: is an oyster a primordial meal?

I asked Eric Ripert, the chef of Le Bernardin. I'd been intending to get in touch, ever since helping Osinski to eliminate three-and-a-half-inch shellfish in order to fill Le Bernardin's uniformly dimensioned order. ("No, no, bigger is not correct," Ripert told me. "It doesn't work. To have a huge chunk of something so slimy in the mouth, this mass of meat—no, no, it's disgusting.") It turns out that Ripert had thought hard about oysters and valued their primordial qualities. For a start, he was an unapologetic head-tipping slurper and a connoisseur of the liquor ("I want to say it tastes of the sea transformed—can you say that in English? It is seawater but no longer seawater"), and an enthusiast of the Long Island crop. ("I come from France and did not expect to find edible oysters here. It was the water. I feared pollution. To my surprise, the water was wonderfully fresh, and the oysters have a briny quality I associate with Normandy.") But when I asked Ripert if he chewed he surprised me.

He paused, deliberating. "Yes," he said, finally.

"How many times?"

"Well . . ." He projected an imaginary bivalve into his mouth. "A couple of times. Actually, may I make a confession? I chew once. My parents taught me this. They told me, 'Eric, you must always bite an oyster, firmly, once. Otherwise, it will be alive in your stomach.' "

I phoned Kim Tetrault, the marine biologist.

"You need to understand what happens when an oyster closes its shell," he explained. "That liquor is not just seawater. It's also part oyster. We call it extrapallial fluid. It's like the blood that bathes an oyster's tissues. When oysters close their shells, they are sealing themselves in their own environment—the world is their oyster—and they will survive as long as the extrapallial fluid doesn't dehydrate." The Romans used to ship their oysters from Britain, a journey that must have taken weeks. Tetrault confirmed that, under certain conditions, an oyster can live that long out of the water. He described his students dissecting shellfish. "If you've shucked an oyster carefully, you haven't killed it. In my classes, we continue feeding it—the gills keep working—and its heart beats for another fifteen minutes."

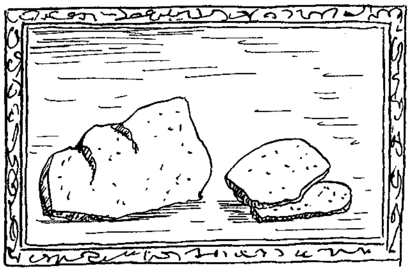
Maybe Osinski was right. Many foods are eaten raw. Many foods are swallowed whole. But how many raw foods are also still alive?

On my third trip to Greenport, our first cage yielded seven hundred oysters. Osinski was thrilled. "Whoopee! I knew I had some around here, I just knew it!" A second cage yielded almost as many, and by the time we pulled up a third Osinski had nearly two thousand oysters. "Oh, Daddy did well today." He was giddy—downright hot-diggety-dog kick-ass happy—as though we'd just caught something wild and rare and managed to pull it in. But we hadn't, had we? We'd merely relocated parcels that he had dropped in the water himself. (Most hunter-gatherers would call that cheating.) Of course Osinski would have no system for organizing. One of the benefits of being a messy person is that your life, in a condition of irretrievable disorder, is full of surprises.

Osinski was an underwater farmer. I'd been so caught up in his adventure—the open air, the water, the struggles to find three-inchers—that I hadn't registered what I'd been seeing. Cages don't occur in the wild. Today, you can eat a flavorless pink thing called "salmon," which arrives at its mealy texture by a form of intensive farming that didn't seem all that different from what I seemed to be witnessing here.

But an oyster is different. The commonplace (among tissue-eaters) is that "wild" is better than farmed because a wild animal is more exercised, more oxygenated, more organically its natural self than anything grown in confinement. An oyster is not active in this wild way. Once oysters find a hard spot to settle on, they're not going anywhere: they eat and exude (having, as Osinski believes, "no brain, just a stomach and an anus—therefore it's O.K. to eat them while they're alive"). According to William K. Brooks, whose 1891 masterpiece, "The Oyster," is still regarded as one of the best accounts of the life of a bivalve, "the adult oyster makes no efforts to obtain its food, it has no way to escape from danger, and after its shell is entered it is perfectly helpless and at the mercy of the smallest enemy. . . . It is almost as inert and inanimate as a plant." (Left alone, oysters live for fifteen years and grow very big; Tetrault has a shell that's a foot long. I looked at it and thought, Ha! Imagine swallowing that one without chewing.)

Today, Brooks's study is interesting for its doomsday predictions. Frightened by the terrible decline of the oysters in Chesapeake Bay, he urged his colleagues to raise shellfish in hatcheries and plant them—like so many acres of potatoes. The Romans knew how to do it; so did the French. Even Colonial Americans did transplanting: by 1775, the Wellfleet, from Cape Cod, was virtually extinct; what you eat today might actually be descended from Chesapeakes.



I saw an example of Brooks's vision on a visit to Fishers Island, where Osinski buys the seed oysters that he plants in cages in his underwater plot. The Fishers Island Oyster Company is run by Steve Malinowski, an aqua-entrepreneur who has managed to raise five children while working on the water. Eight years ago, he began a nursery to insure that he wouldn't wake up and discover he had no oysters. Today, Malinowski produces so many seed oysters—about five million a year—that he sells some to other shellfish farmers. But there has been some tension. Two years ago, Manhattan's top restaurants always offered at least one oyster from Long Island Sound: Fishers Islands, delivered by UPS the day after being harvested. Lately, you saw another: Widow's Holes, delivered by Osinski on the day he'd pulled them out of the water. "It's an interesting dilemma, to visit restaurants and find Mike Osinski's oysters grown from our seeds," Malinowski told me. "We want our buyers to succeed, but maybe not succeed too well."

Malinowski runs the only hatchery on the island, having acquired Ocean Pond Oyster Company. Ocean Pond was started in 1962, after Carey Matthiessen and his brother, the writer Peter Matthiessen, discovered that a seldom visited local pond was full of shellfish. (They'd dragged up an abandoned boat, found it was covered with oysters, and concluded that oysters had been there since the 1938 hurricane blew open a passage to the sea, and the pond, previously freshwater, had become brackish.) Oysters grow well in brackish water because their natural predators can't find them there. Brackish oysters don't have much flavor—"They were big, but bland," according to Carey Matthiessen—and, when mature, are moved to the sea to acquire that crisp salinity that gets the saliva going. But the pond was perfect for baby oysters—a low-salinity incubator.

I visited the hatchery: bubbling green vats of phytoplankton (a bivalve's dinner)

LA BONNE CHANSON

It was all he could do, someone shouted.
They leaned over and he was gone,
the body dissolved in spring filaments.
When they came faster, it was disaster, you
wouldn't believe how many supplicants defected,

and him all ready to rewrite history
if a chance footnote offered itself.
He even tried to laminate my horse,
said it would go better. O I tell you,
the things we had, too many

in our time, too many pebbles on the shore.
We came back later but most of them were gone.
A few shot back the light of the strict stars
and that was all I had to say to you. He'd get mad,
they'd banish us. We'd swim in steep delirium.

—*John Ashbery*

and gallons of seawater heated to the temperature of early summer—an oyster's honeymoon suite. Oysters like warm water—they reproduce when it reaches seventy degrees, and at that time, according to Osinski, "they're not to be eaten because they taste of gonads." (Thus the caution against eating oysters during the "r"-less summer months—"Nobody likes shells full of sex.") In normal conditions, a male spews billions of sperm in the proximity of a female, who then releases millions of eggs—most of which never meet in the topsy-turvy open sea. But in a temperature-controlled tank the process is more efficient, and you need only a few romantic "brood" oysters to produce a few million offspring.

Malinowski introduced me to six brooders. I couldn't tell the boys from the girls, but with oysters it doesn't always matter. Oysters are not just hermaphrodite, as some people believe. They're protandrous: capable of alternating their sex. "You've got no idea what you're going to get," Matthiessen told me. "One year, an oyster produces eggs. The next year, it could be sperm." Oysters hibernate when the temperature drops below forty degrees and seem to lose their gender. "If you pull one out and open it up, its genitals are completely flat—they're not one thing or the other." And then it's anybody's guess what happens when they wake up.

I studied the six shellfish. Not a lot seemed to be happening—six oysters having sex looked a lot like six oysters not having sex. Then I noticed a barely perceptible whitish stream issuing from one. Procreation had begun.

Malinowski showed me an incubation tank with a swirling pink dust: three-day-old larvae, millions of them. Larvae become "spats," which, sheltered, grow to maturity in Ocean Pond, until they're big enough to be taken out to sea. Malinowski's spot was just off one of the island's peninsulas, looking out into the Sound.

We went there in his boat, and he opened up an oyster and gave it to me.

"You chew, don't you?" I had to ask. The question flustered Malinowski—a large-boned, big-handed, rustic sort of fellow, gap-toothed, with a rugged face and a no-nonsense manner.

"No one has ever asked me that before. What do *you* do?" (For a man who'd spent most of his life with oysters, he seemed remarkably uncertain about the etiquette.) He reflected. "Yes, I chew. I've always chewed. If you swallow, you can't taste the oyster. If you swallow, all oysters are the same."

"How many times?"

His jaws leaned left, then right, then left again. "Three times. I chew an oyster three times."

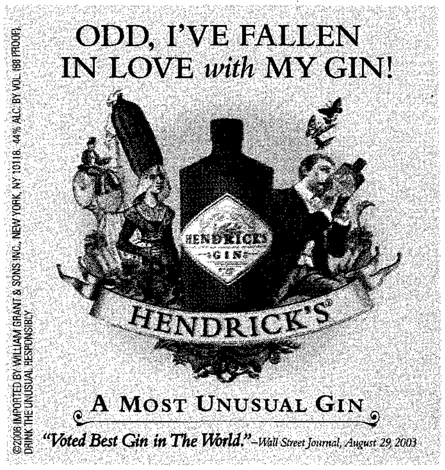
I tipped mine in, heart beating, gills working, and was struck by the liquid—both the amount (a lot) and its saltiness (also a lot). Widow's Hole oysters are briny, but this one was brinier, even though both oysters came from the same seed. The difference was in where Malinowski's had grown up, closer to the open sea. I chewed, once, twice, a third time. It was crunchy (which was curious, because there were no bones). Then, on the fifth chew, I got something I hadn't tasted before: a sweetness.

Malinowski grinned. "Yes, they say that's what's unique about our oysters. That sweetness that kicks in around your last chew."

Salt and sugar, briny and sweet, an evocation of air and clean water; the flavors of the oyster lingered as long as a minute. I asked for another and chewed it—twenty-two times—with relish.

Recently, I was visited by a memory of a trip I took with my grandfather to an ice factory when I was five years old. It was August, 1959: a hot, sultry Louisiana morning and a cold ice factory. My grandfather pulled up to a loading dock—unpaved, a bright-red Louisiana clay—and a man brought us a block of ice wrapped in straw. In the early morning, lots of people were buying blocks of ice wrapped in straw. My grandfather lived in a paper-mill town, and although he had a refrigerator (we'd be making hand-cranked ice cream), most homes still had iceboxes.

The ice factory is gone and its passing is connected with what happened to oysters. My father never bought a block of ice. His was the first generation to enjoy refrigerated mass-market foods. His favorite was Salisbury steak, a factory-made meat that kept long enough to be shipped anywhere. An oyster can't be eaten this way. It needs to be kept cool by ice, because it has to be eaten when it's fresh. That's how you eat oysters—before the ice melts. You have to chew to know the difference, Malinowski told me, which is another way of saying that the difference is everything. Osinski used the word *terroir:* in an oyster, as with wine, you should be able to taste the place it came from; in this still-living creature you will find the water and the food it ate—these living, fragile, handmade creatures tasting wonderfully of the health of the planet. ♦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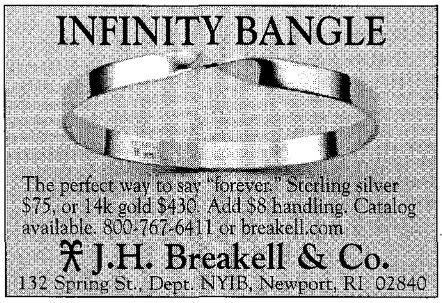
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SHOUTS & MURMURS

NOSTALGIA

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

The other day I was watching TV and it occurred to me that I've become a prude. The show in question was innocuous enough, nothing shocking—just an episode of "Hottie Leaders," featuring computer simulations of what various female world leaders would look like naked and in the throes of orgasm—but somehow, between that and the Pizza Hut commercial where Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson engage in some "girl-on-girl" action in a vast field of pizza sauce, something snapped. I know what the problem is: I'm old. I came of age in a simpler sexual time.

Back in those ancient, prelapsarian days, "girl-on-girl" hadn't even been invented yet. At that time, "girl-on-guy" had only recently been discovered. I remember my parents and their neighbors standing in the yard with a pair of crude human figures made of wood, trying to work out the details. Sometimes a couple would get all worked up and forget where things were supposed to go, and the husband would have to call a friend—only phones were new, too, so sometimes you'd go over to visit a pal from school and there'd be his dad, just standing there naked, phone in hand, totally flummoxed. Women could get pregnant from merely watching a kiss in a movie! Girls, or at least the "good girls," would go to movies blindfolded. I remember once, in fourth grade, I had to get engaged to a girl whose coat I'd brushed up against in the cloakroom. Those were simpler times, but, in some ways, I think, better times.

Same deal with violence. I remember how stunned we all were when the Cain-and-Abel thing happened. What, what? we kept saying. He bludgeoned his brother? With a rock? I remember the first time a severed limb was shown on TV. People were running out of their houses screaming. And it was just a fake leg, in a cartoon! Imagine how horrified those screaming people would be now, when, for example, you can log on to the "Evidence of Evil" Web site and they'll send you a boxful of bloody prosthetics, which you can reassemble into a crack-addicted whore, who will then emit some clues through her computerized voice box—and when you think you know who murdered her you enter the name of the killer on the Web site and, if you're right, you'll get to see a short clip of her making love with her killer moments before he hacks her to bits while she has a flashback of her mother beating her with a chair leg.

I mean, O.K., there was violence when I was a kid, sure, but nobody really *talked* about it. If you got strangled and dismembered, you just got up the next day whistling a happy tune and went down and did some riveting for the war effort. As for computer simulations, sorry, all we had was sketchpads and pencils. If we wanted to see what various female world leaders looked like naked in the throes of orgasm, we had to use a little thing called *the imagination*. Plus, all the world leaders were men back then, and, believe me, once you've drawn Richard Nixon naked and in the throes of orgasm you never have quite the same interest in using your imagination again, and every time you even see a pencil you get a little puky and have to sit down.

Whenever I talk to young people—like some of the teen-agers in my neighborhood, or this one toddler, Maxie, or even a couple of fetuses I run into occasionally—I say to them: Trust me, guys, enjoy your youth, because the level of sex and violence is going to continue to escalate, and, by the time you're my age, the world of your youth will seem like a distant, innocent paradise. The teen-agers and the toddler, Maxie, sometimes they seem to get it, but the fetuses—well, you know fetuses, they're arrogant. To them, it's always going to be a soft gentle ride in a warm comfortable space. And I'm, like, O.K., smart guy, call me in nine months and we'll talk. Or *I* will! You'll just be lying there pink and newborn, with a terrified look on your face, apologizing to me with those little shocked eyes.

Things just keep getting worse. Why, I suspect that, in forty years, when I'm eighty-seven, I'll look back at the present level of sex and violence and go: Ha! Ho-ho! You called *that* sex and violence? That was *nothing*. That was Puritanism and pacifism compared to now! But then I'll have to go, because it will be Stripper Night at the old folks' home, and I'll have to find my costume and my back brace, but on the way there I'll be killed by a mysterious old-folks'-home invader, who actually works for Fox and is committing and filming my murder for later broadcast on "When Codgers on Their Way to Strip Look Terrified."

Same with music, though, right? I used to love music, back when it had melody and chords and lyrics. But now it has no melody and no chords, just *thwack-thwacking*, and they even seem to be cutting back on the *thwack-thwacking*, so now it's sometimes just *thwa*, and, as far as lyrics, do you consider these lyrics?

Hump my hump,
My stumpy lumpy hump!
Hump my dump, you lumpy slumpy
  dump!
I'll dump your hump, and then just
  hump your dump,
You lumpy frumply clump.

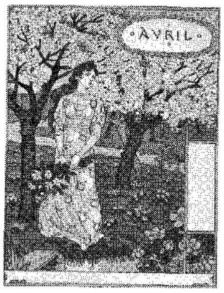
I'm sorry. To me? Those are not lyrics. In my day, lyrics were used to express real emotion, like the emotion of being totally stoned and trying to talk this totally stoned chick into sleeping with you in the name of love, which lasted forever, if only you held on to your dreams.

These kids today, I don't know what they believe. I mean, I don't even know what I believe anymore, but what I do *not* believe is that watching Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson roll around in pizza sauce is helping our youth as they go forth and try to figure out what they believe! Scientific evidence suggests that even the fetuses inside of mothers watching that commercial are getting (1) dumber and (2) little baby boners. I do not go for that. I think that when a fetus is in the womb it should just be floating around with its undersized arrogant head empty and its little nascent penis just, you know, inactive. We grow these kids up too fast, and, next thing you know, out come the Indian and the Chinese fetuses, and they start taking away the jobs of our homeland fetuses, and why? Because these foreign fetuses aren't *jaded*. They're innocent like I was, like my whole generation was, when we were fetuses, back in those long-forgotten idyllic days when American fetuses walked the earth like happy unsoiled giants, doing algebra and reading the classics.

And yet I don't like the fact that I've become a prude. Life expectancies being what they are, I may be only halfway through my life, and who wants to live out half one's life as a prude? Not me. I want to live out about one-tenth of my life as a prude, that last tenth, when I'm inert and confused and immobile anyway. So I've decided to start prude-proofing myself via a series of daily micro-immersions in sex and violence. Last week, for example, I sat on my couch looking at a bra for over an hour. Then I forced myself to watch a video of a duck being hit by a car. Then I tried listening to the sound of the duck on the video being hit by the car, while looking at the bra. Next, I turned up the sound, while looking at a slightly sexier bra. Then I watched the duck being hit while I ran my hand over the bra. Then I had my wife put on the bra, which was a very effective technique, because as I tried to run my hand over the bra my wife nailed me with an ashtray just as the duck was hit by the car—one of the best micro-immersions in sex and violence a guy could ask for.

And tonight is my biggest depruding test yet: I am going to, while hitting myself with a brick and begging my wife to walk by in her bra, watch an episode of "Dream Yer Final Dream!," on which a contestant selected from a field of more than five thousand applicants will be granted his Final Dream, which, in this case, is to be beaten nearly to death with a tire iron so that Carmen Electra can come in naked and give him a lap dance in the last moments of his life.

I have high hopes. I know I can do this. If I succeed, our whole culture will once again be open to me. And who knows? I may even go see a movie. ♦



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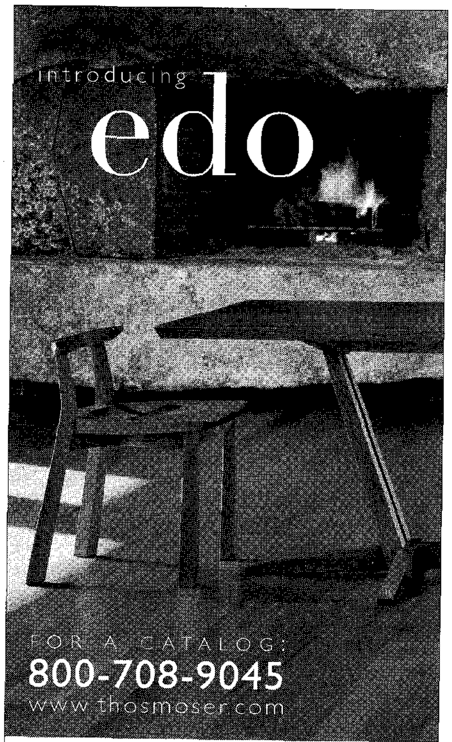

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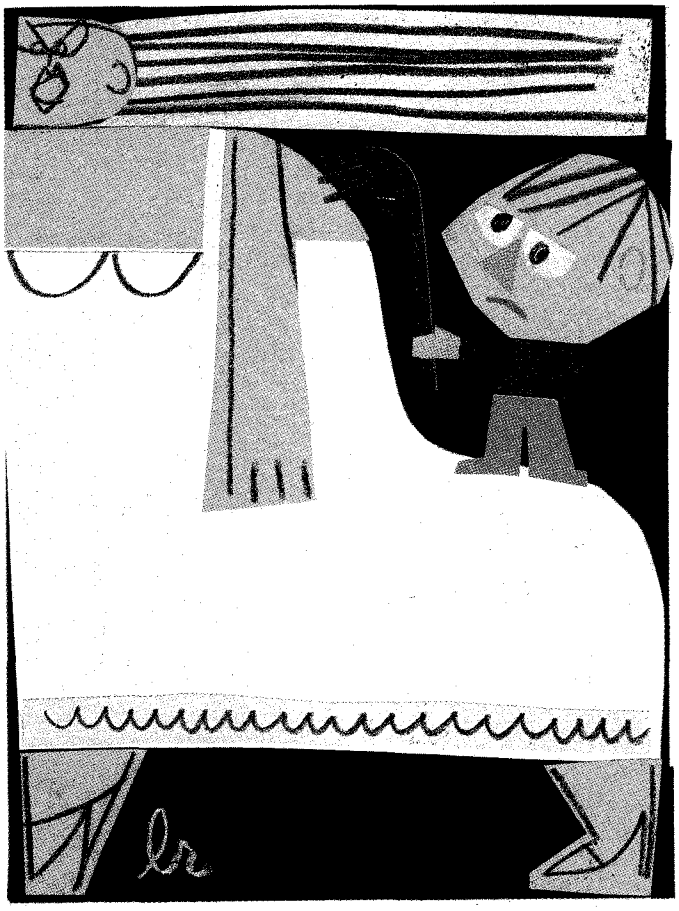
REFLECTIONS

THE UNDERSTUDY

The week of Mrs. Peacock.

BY DAVID SEDARIS

In the spring of 1967, my mother and father went out of town for the weekend and left my four sisters and me in the company of a woman named Mrs. Byrd, who was old and black and worked as a maid for one of our Raleigh neighbors. She arrived at our house on a Friday afternoon, and, after carrying her suitcase to my parents' bedroom, I gave her a little tour, the way I imagined they did in hotels. "This is your TV, this is your private sun deck, and over here you've got a bathroom—just yours, and nobody else's."



Our mother could never remember how she found Mrs. Peacock.

LAURIE ROSENWALD

Mrs. Byrd put her hand to her cheek. "Somebody pinch me, I'm about to fall out."

She cooed again when I opened a dresser drawer, and explained that when it came to coats and so forth we favored a little room called a closet. "There are two of them against the wall there, and you can use the one on the right."

It was, I thought, a dream for her: *your* telephone, *your* massive bed, *your* glass-doored shower stall. All you had to do was leave it a little cleaner than you found it.

A few months later, my parents went away again and left us with Mrs. Robbins, who was also black, and who, like Mrs. Byrd, allowed me to see myself as a miracle worker. Night fell, and I pictured her kneeling on the carpet, her forehead grazing my parents' gold bedspread. "Thank you, Jesus, for these wonderful white people and all that they have given me this fine weekend."

With a regular teen-age babysitter, you horsed around, jumped her on her way out of the bathroom, that sort of thing, but with Mrs. Robbins and Mrs. Byrd we were respectful and well behaved, not like ourselves at all. This made my parents' getaway weekend a getaway for us as well—for what was a vacation but a chance to be someone different?

In early September of that same year, my parents joined my Aunt Joyce and Uncle Dick for a week in the Virgin Islands. Neither Mrs. Byrd nor Mrs. Robbins was available to stay with us, and so my mother found someone named Mrs. Peacock. Exactly *where* she found her would be speculated on for the remainder of our childhood.

"Has Mom ever been to a ladies' prison?" my sister Amy would ask.

The question made sense because the woman was such a liar. *Mrs.* Peacock indeed! As if anyone would have taken her as a wife. "She just says she was married so people will believe in her!!!!" This was one of the insights we recorded in a notebook while she was staying with us. There were pages of them, all written in a desperate scrawl, with lots of exclamation points and underlined words. It was the sort of writing you might do when a ship was going down, the sort that would give your surviving loved ones an actual chill. "If only we'd known," they'd moan. "Oh, for the love of God, if only we had known."

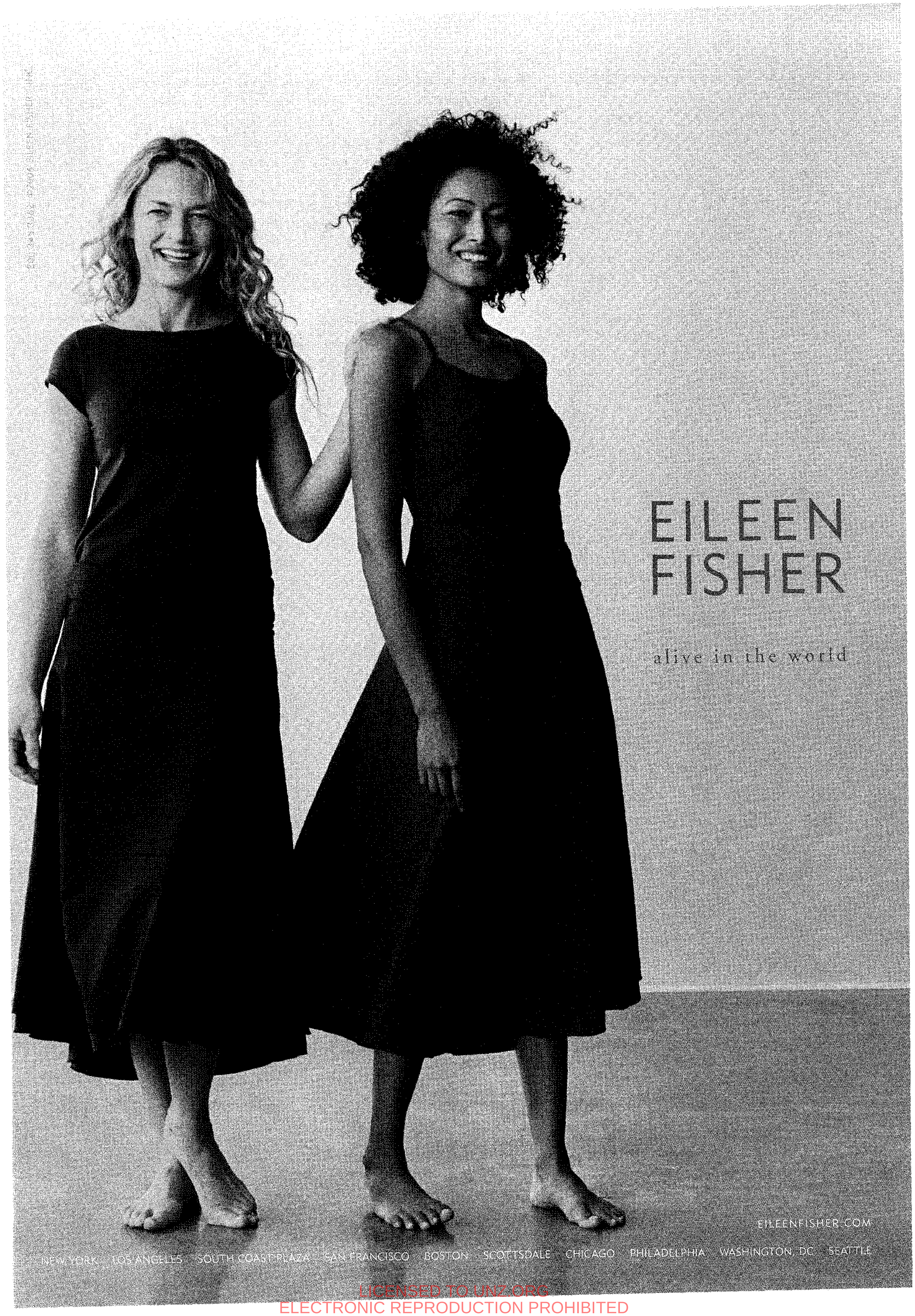
But what was to know, really? Some fifteen-year-old offers to watch your kids for the night and, sure, you ask her parents about her, you nose around; but with a grown woman you didn't demand a reference, especially if the woman was white.

Our mother could never remember where she had found Mrs. Peacock. "A newspaper ad," she'd say, or, "I don't know, maybe she sat for someone at the club."

But who at the club would have hired such a person? In order to become a member you had to meet certain requirements, one of them being that you did not know people like Mrs. Peacock.

I smelled trouble the moment her car pulled up, a wreck of a thing driven by a guy with no shirt on. He looked just old enough to start shaving, and remained seated as the figure beside him pushed open the door and eased her way out. This was Mrs. Peacock, and the first thing I noticed was her hair, which was the color of margarine and fell in waves to the middle of her back. It was the sort of hair you might find on a mermaid, completely wrong for a sixty-year-old woman who was not just heavy but fat, and moved as if each step might be her last.

"Mom!" I called, and, as my mother stepped out of the house, the man with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no shirt backed out of the driveway, and peeled off down the street.

"Was that your husband?" my mother asked, and Mrs. Peacock looked at the spot where the car had been.

"Naw," she said. "That's just Keith."

Not "my nephew Keith," or "Keith, who works at the filling station and is wanted in five states," but "just Keith," as if we had read a book about her life, and were expected to remember all the characters.

She did this a lot over the coming week, and I grew to hate her for it. Someone would phone the house and after hanging up she'd say, "So much for Eugene," or "I told Vicky not to call me here no more."

"Who's Eugene?" we'd ask. "What did Vicky do that was so bad?" And she'd tell us to mind our own business.

She had this attitude, not that she was better than us but that she was as good as us—and that simply was not true. Look at her suitcase, tied shut with rope! Listen to her mumble—not a clear sentence to be had. A polite person would express admiration when given a tour of the house, but, aside from a few questions regarding the stove top Mrs. Peacock said very little, and merely shrugged when shown the master bathroom, which had the word "master" in it, and was supposed to make you feel powerful and lucky to be alive. *I've seen better,* her look seemed to say, but I didn't for one moment believe it.

The first two times my parents left for vacation, my sisters and I escorted them to the door and said that we would miss them terribly. It was just an act, designed to make us look sensitive and English, but on this occasion we meant it. "Oh, stop being such babies," our mother said. "It's only a week." Then she gave Mrs. Peacock the look meaning, "Kids. What are you going to do?"

There was a corresponding look that translated to "You tell me," but Mrs. Peacock didn't need it, for she knew exactly what she was going to do—enslave us. An hour after my parents left, she was lying face down on their bed, dressed in nothing but her slip. Like her skin, it was the color of Vaseline, an uncolor really, that looked even worse with yellow hair. Add to this her great bare legs, which were dimpled at the inner knee, and streaked all over with angry purple veins.

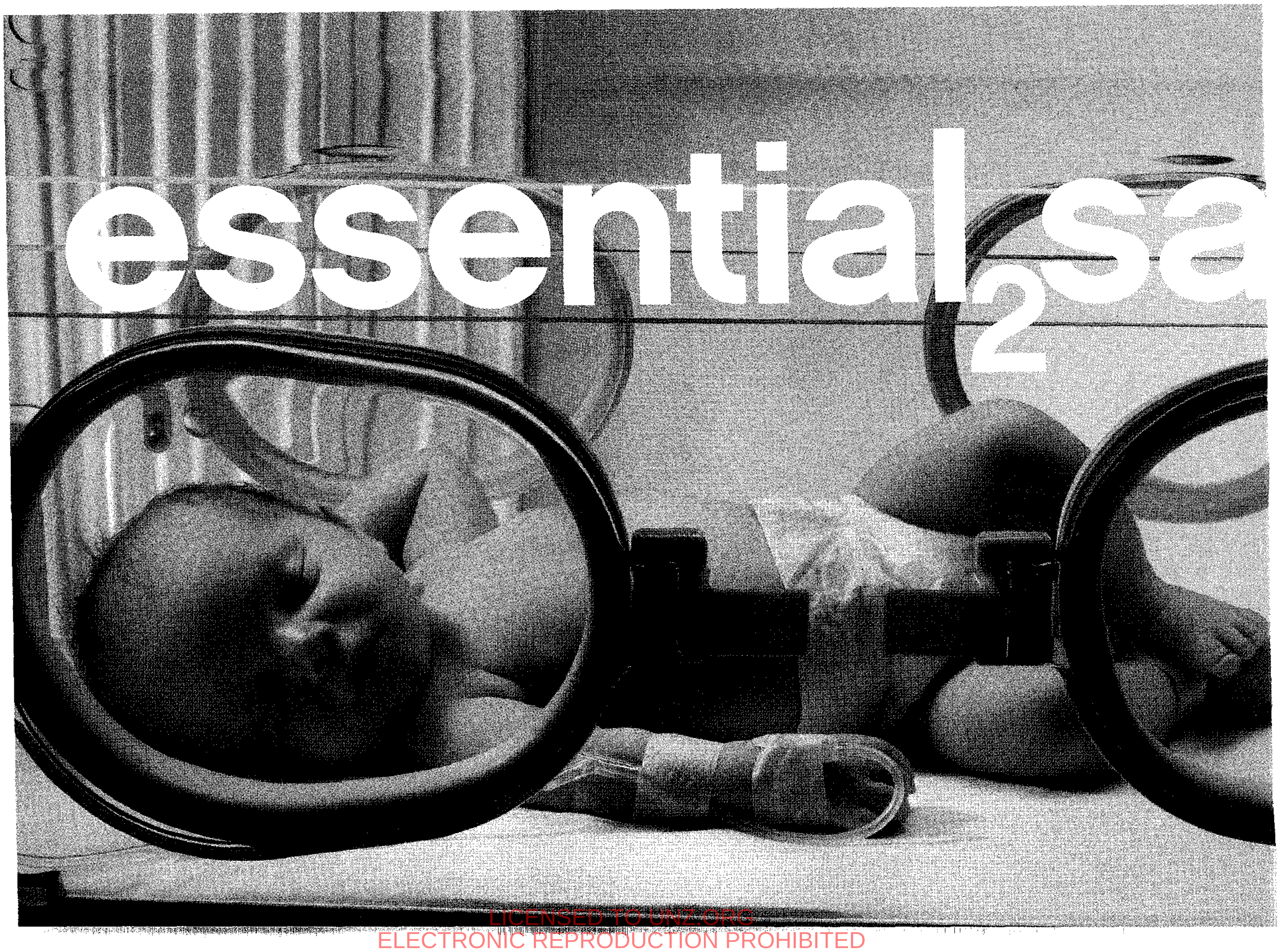
My sisters and I attempted diplomacy. "Isn't there, perhaps, some *work* to be done?"

"You there, the one with the glasses." Mrs. Peacock pointed at my sister Gretchen. "Your mama mentioned they's some sodie pops in the kitchen. Go fetch me one, why don't you."

"Do you mean Coke?" Gretchen asked.

"That'll do," Mrs. Peacock said. "And put it in a mug with ice in it."

While Gretchen got the Coke, I was instructed to close the drapes. It was, to me, an idea that bordered on insanity, and I tried my best to talk her out of it.



"The private deck is your room's best feature," I said. "Do you *really* want to block it out while the sun's still shining?"

She did. Then she wanted her suitcase. My sister Amy put it on the bed, and we watched as Mrs. Peacock untied the rope and reached inside, removing a plastic hand attached to a foot-long wand. The business end was no bigger than a monkey's paw, the fingers bent slightly inward, as if they had been frozen in the act of begging. It was a nasty little thing, the nails slick with grease, and over the coming week we were to see a lot of it. To this day, should any of our boyfriends demand a back-scratch, my sisters and I recoil. "Brush yourself against a brick wall," we say. "Hire a nurse, but don't look at me. I've done my time."

No one spoke of carpal-tunnel syndrome in the late nineteen-sixties, but that doesn't mean it didn't exist. Again and again we ran the paw over Mrs. Peacock's back, the fingers leaving white trails and sometimes welts. "Ease up," she'd say, the straps of her slip lowered to her forearms, the side of her face mashed flat against the gold bedspread. "I ain't made of stone, you know."

That much was clear. Stone didn't sweat. Stone didn't break out in a rash, and it certainly didn't sprout little black hairs between its shoulder blades. We drew this last one to Mrs. Peacock's attention, and she responded saying, "Y'all's got the same damn thing only they ain't poked out yet."

That one was written down verbatim, and read aloud during the daily crisis meetings my sisters and I had taken to holding in the woods behind our house. "Y'all's got the same damn thing only they ain't poked out yet." It sounded chilling when said in her voice, and even worse when recited normally.

"Can't speak English," I wrote in the complaint book. "Can't go two minutes without using the word 'damn.' Can't cook worth a damn hoot."

The last part was not quite true, but it wouldn't have hurt her to expand her repertoire. Sloppy joe, sloppy joe, sloppy joe, held over our heads as if it were steak. Nobody ate unless they earned it, which meant fetching her drinks, brushing her hair, driving the monkey paw into her shoulders until she moaned. Mealtime came and went—Mrs. Peacock too full of Coke and potato chips to notice until one of us dared to mention it. "If y'all was hungry, why didn't you say nothing? I'm not a mind reader, you know—not your swami or some damn thing."

Then she'd slam around the kitchen, her upper arms jiggling as she threw the pan on the burner, pitched in some ground beef, shook ketchup into it.

My sisters and I sat at the table, but Mrs. Peacock ate standing, *like a cow,* we thought, *a cow with a telephone:* "You tell Curtis for me that if he don't run Tanya to R.C.'s hearing, he'll have to answer to both me *and* Gene Junior, and that's no lie."

Her phone calls reminded her that she was away from the action. Events

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were coming to a head: the drama with Ray, the business between Kim and Lucille, and here she was, stuck in the middle of nowhere. That's how she saw our house: the end of the earth. In a few years' time, I'd be the first to agree with her, but when I was eleven, and you could still smell the fresh pine joists behind the Sheetrocked walls, I thought there was no finer place to be.

"I'd like to see where *she* lives," I said to my sister Lisa.

And then, as punishment, we did see.

This occurred on Day Five, and was Amy's fault—at least, according to Mrs. Peacock. Any sane adult, anyone with children, might have taken the blame upon herself. *Oh well,* she would have thought. *It was bound to happen sooner or later.* Seven-year-old girl, her arm worn to rubber after hours of back-scratching, carries the monkey paw into the master bathroom, where it drops from her hand and falls to the tile floor. The fingers shattered clean off, leaving nothing—a jagged little fist at the end of a stick.

"Now you done it," Mrs. Peacock said—all of us to bed without supper—and the next morning Keith pulled up, still with no shirt on. He honked in the driveway, and she shouted at him through the closed door to hold his damn horses.

"I don't think he can hear you," Gretchen said, and Mrs. Peacock told her she'd had all the lip she was going to take. She'd had all the lip she was going to take from any of us, and so we were quiet as we piled into the car, Keith telling a convoluted story about him and someone named Sherwood as he sped beyond the Raleigh we knew, and into a neighborhood of barking dogs and gravel driveways. The houses looked like something a child might draw—a row of shaky squares with triangles on top. Add a door, add two windows. Think of putting a tree in the front yard, and then decide against it because branches aren't worth the trouble.

Mrs. Peacock's place was divided in half, her in the back and someone named Leslie living in the front. A *man* named Leslie, who wore fatigues and stood by the mailbox wrestling with a Doberman pinscher as we drove up. I thought he would scowl at the sight of Mrs. Peacock, but instead he smiled and waved, and she waved in return. Five children wedged into the back seat, children just dying to report that they'd been abducted, but Leslie didn't seem to notice us any more than Keith had.

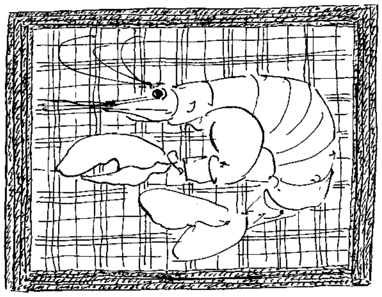
When the car stopped, Mrs. Peacock turned around in the front seat, and announced that she had some work that needed doing.

"Go ahead," we told her. "We'll wait here."

"Like fun you will," she said.

We started outdoors, picking up turds deposited by the Doberman, whose name turned out to be Rascal. The front yard was mined with them, but the back, which Mrs. Peacock tended, was surprisingly normal, better than normal, really. There was a small lawn and, along its border, a narrow bed of low-lying flowers—pansies, I think. There were more flowers on the patio outside her door, most of them in plastic pots, and kept company by little ceramic creatures: a squirrel with its tail broken off, a smiling toad.

I'd thought of Mrs. Peacock as a person for whom the word "cute" did not register, and so it was startling to enter her part of the house and find it filled with dolls. There must have been a hundred of them, all squeezed into a single room. There were dolls sitting on the television, dolls standing with their feet glued to the top of the electric fan, and tons more crowded onto floor-to-ceiling shelves. Strange to me was that she hadn't segregated them according to size or quality. Here was a fashion model in a stylish dress, dwarfed by a cheap bawling baby, or a little girl who'd apparently come too close to the hot plate, her hair singed off, her face disfigured into a frown.



"First rule is that nobody touches nothing," Mrs. Peacock said. "Not nobody and not for no reason."

She obviously thought that her home was something special—a children's paradise, a land of enchantment, but to my sisters and me it was just dark and overcrowded. Mrs. Peacock had a Dixie-cup dispenser mounted to the wall above her dresser. She kept her bedroom slippers beside the bathroom door, and inside each one was a little troll doll, its hair blown back as if by a fierce wind. "See," she told us, "it's like they's riding in boats!"

"Right," we said. "That's really something."

She then pointed out a miniature kitchen set displayed on one of the lower shelves. "The refrigerator broke, so I made me another one out of a matchbox. Get up close and you can look at it."

"You *made* this?" we said, though of course it was obvious. The strike pad gave it away.

Mrs. Peacock was clearly trying to be a good hostess, but I wished she would stop. My opinion of her had already been formed, was written on paper, even, and factoring in her small kindnesses would only muddy the report. Like any normal fifth grader, I preferred my villains to be evil and stay that way, to act like Dracula rather than Frankenstein's monster, who ruined everything by handing that peasant girl a flower. He sort of made up for it by drowning her a few minutes later, but, still, you couldn't look at him the same way again. My sisters and I didn't want to understand Mrs. Peacock. We just wanted to hate her, and so we were relieved when she reached into her closet and withdrew another back-scratcher, the good one, apparently. It was no larger than the earlier model, but the hand was slimmer and more clearly defined, that of a lady rather than a monkey. The moment she had it, the hostess act melted away. Off came the man's shirt she'd worn over her slip, and she took up her position on the bed, surrounded by the baby dolls she referred to as "doll babies." Gretchen was given the first shift, and the rest of us were sent outside to pull weeds in the blistering sun.

"Thank God," I said to Lisa. "I was worried for a minute there that we'd have to feel sorry for her."

As children, we suspected that Mrs. Peacock was crazy, a catchall term we used for anyone who did not recognize our charms. As adults, though, we narrow it down, and wonder if she wasn't clinically depressed. The drastic mood swings, the hours of sleep, a gloom so heavy she was unable to get dressed or wash herself—thus the slip, thus the hair that grew greasier and greasier as the week progressed, and left a permanent stain on our parents' gold bedspread.

"I wonder if she'd been institutionalized," Lisa will say. "Maybe she had shock treatments, which is what they did back then, the poor thing."

We'd like to have been that compassionate as children, but we already had our list, and it was unthinkable to disregard it on account of a lousy matchbox. Our parents returned from their vacation, and before they even stepped out of the car we were upon them, a mob, all of us talking at the same time. "She made us go to her shack and pick up turds." "She sent us to bed one night without supper." "She said the master bathroom was ugly, and that you were stupid to have air-conditioning."

"All right," our mother said. "Jesus, calm down."

"She made us scratch her back until our arms almost fell off," "She cooked sloppy joes every night, and when we ran out of buns she told us to eat it on crackers."

We were still at it when Mrs. Peacock stepped from the breakfast nook and out into the carport. She was dressed, for once, and even had shoes on, but it was too late to play normal. In the presence of my mother, who was tanned and pretty, she looked all the more unhealthy, sinister, almost, her mouth twisted into a freaky smile.

"She spent the whole week in bed and didn't do laundry until last night."

I guess I expected a violent showdown. How else to explain my disappointment when, instead of slapping Mrs. Peacock across the face, my mother looked her in the eye, and said, "Oh, come on. I don't believe that for a minute." It was the phrase she used when she believed every word of it but was too tired to care.

"But she *abducted* us."

"Well, good for her." Our mother led Mrs. Peacock into the house, and left my sisters and me standing in the carport. "Aren't they just horrible?" she said. "Honest to God, I don't know how you put up with them for an entire week."

"You don't know how *she* put up with *us*—" *Slam!* went the door, right in our faces. Then our mom sat her guest down in the breakfast nook and offered her a drink. Framed through the window, they looked like figures on a stage, two characters who seem like opposites and then discover they have a lot in common: a similarly hard upbringing, a fondness for the jugged Burgundies of California, and a mutual disregard for the rowdy matinée audience, pitching their catcalls from beyond the parted curtain. ♦

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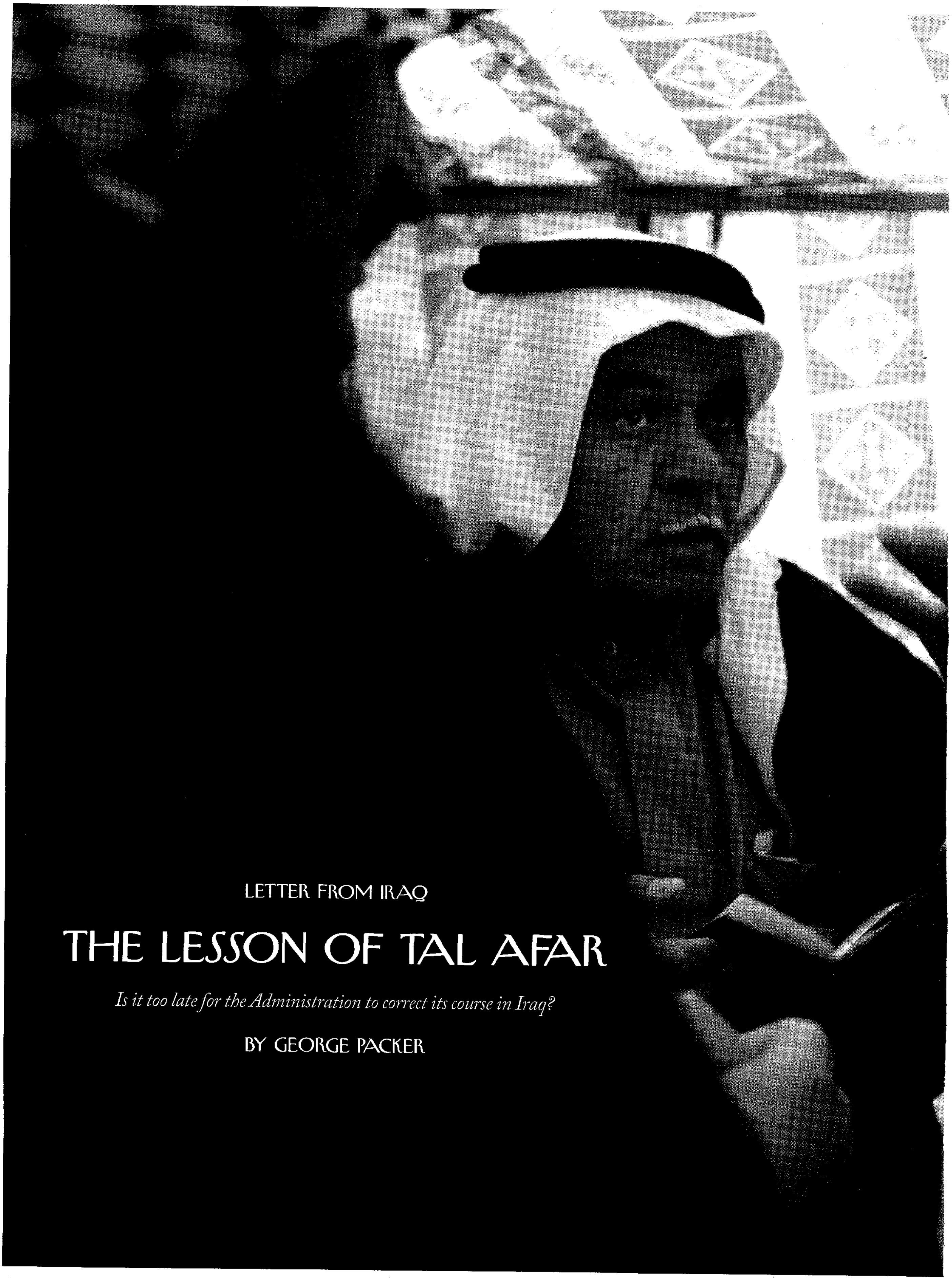
LETTER FROM IRAQ

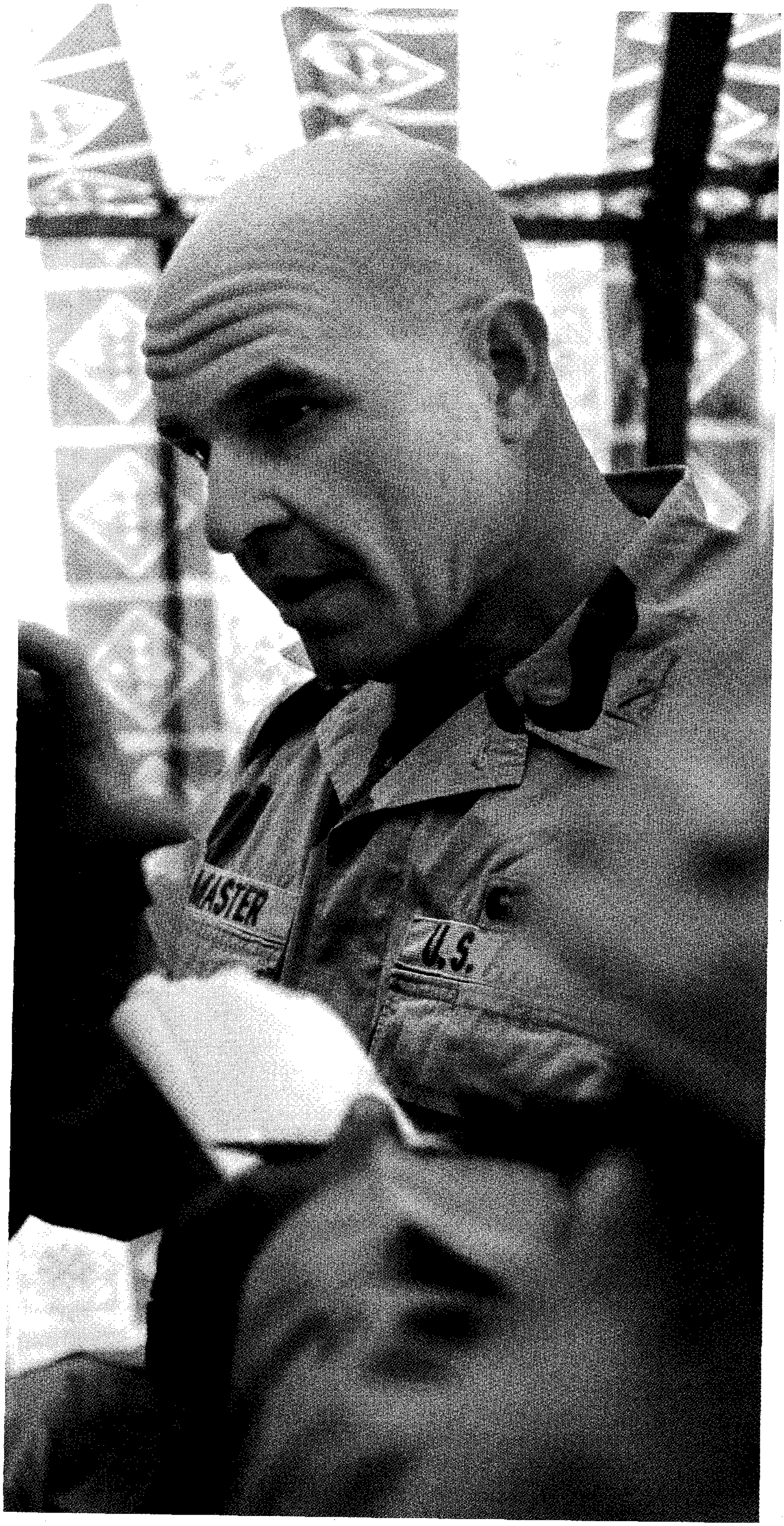
THE LESSON OF TAL AFAR

Is it too late for the Administration to correct its course in Iraq?

BY GEORGE PACKER



Colonel H. R. McMaster, a Gulf War veteran with a history doctorate, tells his soldiers in Iraq, “You gotta come in with your ears open



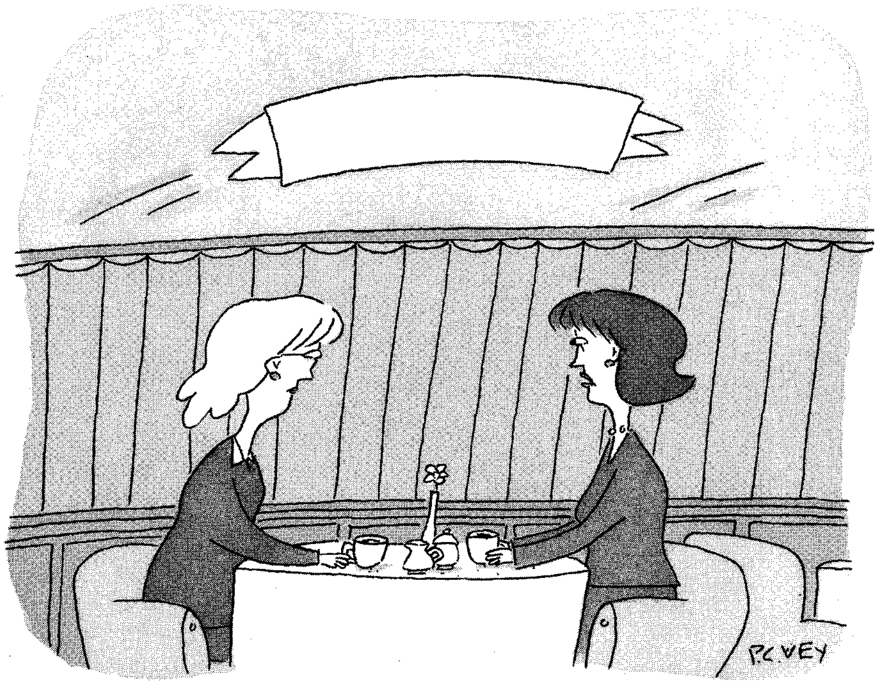
’ou have to really listen to people.” Photographs by Samantha Appleton.

Tal Afar is an ancient city of a quarter-million inhabitants, situated on a smuggling route in the northwestern desert of Iraq, near the Syrian border. In January, when I visited, the streets had been muddied by cold winter rains and gouged by the tracks of armored vehicles. Tal Afar’s stone fortifications and narrow alleys had the haggard look of a French town in the First World War that had changed hands several times. In some neighborhoods, markets were open and children played in the streets; elsewhere, in areas cordoned off by Iraqi checkpoints, shops remained shuttered, and townspeople peered warily from front doors and gates.

Since the Iraq war began, American forces had repeatedly driven insurgents out of Tal Afar, but the Army did not have enough troops to maintain a sufficient military presence there, and insurgents kept returning to terrorize the city. In early 2004, the division that had occupied northwestern Iraq was replaced by a brigade, with one-third the strength. A single company—about a hundred and fifty soldiers—became responsible for protecting Tal Afar. Insurgents soon seized the city and turned it into a strategic stronghold.

Last fall, thousands of American and Iraqi soldiers moved in to restore government control. This time, a thousand Americans stayed, and they slowly established trust among community leaders and local residents; by January, a tenuous peace had taken hold. The operation was a notable success in the Administration’s newly proclaimed strategy of counterinsurgency, which has been described by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as “clear, hold, and build.” Last month, in a speech in Cleveland, President Bush hailed the achievement in Tal Afar as evidence that Iraq is progressing toward a stable future. “Tal Afar shows that when Iraqis can count on a basic level of safety and security, they can live together peacefully,” he said. “The people of Tal Afar have shown why spreading liberty and democracy is at the heart of our strategy to defeat the terrorists.”

But the story of Tal Afar is not so simple. The effort came after numerous failures, and very late in the war—perhaps too late. And the operation succeeded despite an absence of guidance from senior civilian and military leaders



"I don't see myself bringing children into a world where I can't get a date."

• •

start talking. You have to really *listen* to people."

McMaster is a West Point graduate who earned a Silver Star for battlefield prowess during the 1991 Gulf War: his armored cavalry troop stumbled across an Iraqi mechanized brigade in the middle of a sandstorm and destroyed it. That war was a textbook case of what the military calls "kinetic operations," or major combat in relatively uncomplicated circumstances; the field of battle was almost easier, some Gulf War veterans say, than the live-fire exercises at the National Training Center, in Fort Irwin, California. After the war, McMaster earned a doctorate in history from the University of North Carolina. His dissertation, based on research in newly declassified archives, was published in 1997, with the title "Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam." The book assembled a damning case against senior military leaders for failing to speak their minds when, in the early years of the war, they disagreed with Pentagon policies. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, knowing that Johnson and McNamara wanted uncritical support rather than honest advice, and eager to protect their careers, went along with official lies and a split-the-difference strategy of gradual escalation that none of them thought could work. "Dereliction of Duty" won McMaster wide praise, and its candor inspired an ardent following among post-Vietnam officers.

In April, 2003, at the moment when General Tommy Franks's "shock and awe" campaign against the regime of Saddam Hussein appeared to be a clean victory, the Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership approved the release of a monograph by McMaster entitled "Crack in the Foundation: Defense Transformation and the Underlying Assumption of Dominant Knowledge in Future War." McMaster, who describes himself as "a bit of a Luddite," argued against the notion that new weapons technology offered the promise of certainty and precision in warfare. The success of the Gulf War, he wrote, had led military thinkers to forget that war is, above all, a human endeavor. He examined the messier operations of the nineteen-nineties, beginning with the debacle in Somalia, and concluded,

in Washington. The soldiers who worked to secure Tal Afar were, in a sense, rebels against an incoherent strategy that has brought the American project in Iraq to the brink of defeat.

THE "I" WORD

Colonel H. R. McMaster, the commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, is forty-three years old, a small man, thick in the middle, with black eyebrows that are the only signs of hair on a pale, shaved head. His features are deeply furrowed across the brow and along the nose, as if his head had been shaped from modelling clay; but when he grins mischief creases his face, and it's easy to imagine him as an undaunted ten-year-old, marching around and giving orders in his own private war. The first time I saw him, he had a football in his hands and was throwing hard spirals to a few other soldiers next to his plywood headquarters, on a muddy airfield a few miles south of Tal Afar.

McMaster and the 3rd A.C.R. had been stationed in Tal Afar for nine months. When they arrived, in the spring of 2005, the city was largely in the hands of hard-core Iraqi and foreign jihadis, who, together with members of the local Sunni population, had destabilized the city with a campaign of intimidation, including beheadings aimed largely at Tal Afar's Shiite minority. By October, after months of often fierce fighting and painstaking negotiations with local leaders, McMaster's regiment, working alongside Iraqi Army battalions, had established bases around the city and greatly reduced the violence. When I met McMaster, his unit was about to return home; the men were to be replaced by a brigade of the 1st Armored Division that had no experience in Tal Afar, and no one knew if the city would remain secure. (Within weeks, there were reports that sectarian killings were on the rise.)

The lessons that McMaster and his soldiers applied in Tal Afar were learned during the first two years of an increasingly unpopular war. "When we came to Iraq, we didn't understand the complexity—what it meant for a society to live under a brutal dictatorship, with ethnic and sectarian divisions," he said, in his hoarse, energetic voice. "When we first got here, we made a lot of mistakes. We were like a blind man, trying to do the right thing but breaking a lot of things." Later, he said, "You gotta come in with your ears open. You can't come in and

"What is certain about the future is that even the best efforts to predict the conditions of future war will prove erroneous. What is important, however, is to not be so far off the mark that visions of the future run counter to the very nature of war and render American forces unable to adapt to unforeseen challenges."

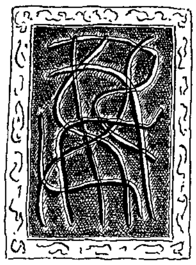
In the spring of 2003, McMaster joined the staff of General John Abizaid at Central Command. Abizaid soon took over from Franks, who got out of Iraq and the military just as his three-week triumph over the Baathist regime showed signs of turning into a long ordeal. Although the violence in Iraq was rapidly intensifying, no one at the top levels of the government or the military would admit that an insurgency was forming.

"They didn't even want to say the 'i' word," one officer in Iraq told me. "It was the spectre of Vietnam. They did not want to say the 'insurgency' word, because the next word you say is 'quagmire.' The next thing you say is 'the only war America has lost.' And the next thing you conclude is that certain people's vision of war is wrong."

The most stubborn resistance to the idea of an insurgency came from Donald Rumsfeld, the Defense Secretary, who was determined to bring about a "revolution in military affairs" at the Pentagon—the transformation of war fighting into a combination of information technology and precision firepower that would eliminate the need for large numbers of ground troops and prolonged involvement in distant countries. "It's a vision of war that totally neglects the psychological and cultural dimensions of war," the officer said. Rumsfeld's denial of the existence of the insurgency turned on technicalities: insurgencies were fought against sovereign governments, he argued, and in 2003 Iraq did not yet have one.

In October of that year, a classified National Intelligence Estimate warned that the insurgency was becoming broad-based among Sunni Arabs who were unhappy with the American presence in Iraq, and that it would expand and intensify, with a serious risk of civil war. But Rumsfeld, President Bush, and other Administration officials continued to call the escalating violence in Iraq the work of a small number of Baathist "dead-enders" and foreign jihadis. For Rumsfeld, this aversion became a permanent condition. Over Thanksgiving weekend last year, he had a self-described "epiphany" in which he realized that the fighters in Iraq didn't deserve the word "insurgents." The following week, at a Pentagon press conference, when the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps General Peter Pace, said, rather sheepishly, "I have to use the word 'insurgent,' because I can't think of a better word right now," Rumsfeld cut in, "'Enemies of the legitimate Iraqi government'—how's that?"

The refusal of Washington's leaders to acknowledge the true character of the war in Iraq had serious consequences on the battlefield: in the first eighteen months, the United States government failed to organize a strategic response to the insurgency. Captain Jesse Sellars, a troop commander in the 3rd A.C.R., who fought in some of the most violent parts of western Iraq in 2003 and 2004, told me about a general who visited his unit and announced, "This is not an insurgency." Sellars recalled thinking, "Well, if you could tell us what it is, that'd be awesome." In the absence of guidance, the 3rd A.C.R. adopted a heavy-handed approach, conducting frequent raids that were often based on bad information. The regiment was constantly moved around, so that officers were never able to form relationships with local people or learn from mistakes. Eventually, the regiment became responsible for vast tracts of Anbar province, with hundreds of miles bordering Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria; it had far too few men to secure any area.



A proper strategy would have demanded the coördinated use of all the tools of American power in Iraq: political, economic, and military. "Militarily, you've got to call it an insurgency," McMaster said, "because we have a counterinsurgency doctrine and theory that you want to access." The classic doctrine, which was developed by the British in Malaya in the nineteen-forties and fifties, says that counterinsurgency warfare is twenty per cent military and eighty per cent political. The focus of operations is on the civilian population: isolating residents from insurgents, providing security, building a police force, and allowing political and economic development to take place so that the government commands the allegiance of its citizens. A counterinsurgency strategy involves both offensive and defensive operations, but there is an emphasis on using the minimum amount of force necessary. For all these reasons, such a strategy is extremely hard to carry out, especially for the American military, which focusses on combat operations. Counterinsurgency cuts deeply against the Army's institutional instincts. The doctrine fell out of use after Vietnam, and the Army's most recent field manual on the subject is two decades old.

The Pentagon's strategy in 2003 and 2004 was to combat the insurgency simply by eliminating insurgents—an approach called "kill-capture." Kalev Sepp, a retired Special Forces officer, who now teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California, said of the method, "It's all about hunting people. I think it comes directly from the Secretary of Defense—'I want heads on a plate.' You'll get some people that way, but the failure of that approach is evident: they get Hussein, they get his sons, they continue every week to kill more, capture more, they've got facilities full of thousands of detainees, yet there's more insurgents than there were when they started." In "Dereliction of Duty," McMaster wrote that a strategy of attrition "was, in essence, the absence of a strategy."

During the first year of the war, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez was the commander of military operations in Iraq. He never executed a campaign plan—as if, like Rumsfeld, he assumed that America was about to leave. As a result, there was no governing logic to the Army's myriad operations. T. X. Hammes, a retired Marine colonel who served in Baghdad in early 2004, said, "Each division was operating so differently, right next to the other—absolutely hard-ass here, and hearts-and-minds here." In the first year of the war, in Falluja and Ramadi, Major General Charles Swannack, of the 82nd Airborne Division, emphasized killing and capturing the enemy, and the war grew worse in those places; in northern Iraq, Major General David Petraeus, of the

101st Airborne Division, focussed on winning over the civilian population by encouraging economic reconstruction and local government, and had considerable success. "Why is the 82nd hard-ass and the 101st so different?" Hammes asked. "Because Swannack sees it differently than Petraeus. But that's Sanchez's job. That's why you have a corps commander." Lieutenant General Sanchez, who never received his fourth star, remains the only senior military official to have suffered professionally for the failures of the Iraq war. (He is now stationed in Germany.)

From his post in Central Command, McMaster pushed for a more imaginative and coherent response to an insurgency that he believed was made up of highly decentralized groups with different agendas making short-term alliances of convenience. By August, 2004, Falluja had fallen under insurgent control, Mosul had begun to collapse, and Najaf had become the scene of a ferocious battle. On August 5th, General George Casey, Sanchez's successor, signed the Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign plan. The document, which was largely written on Sanchez's watch, remains classified, but Kalev Sepp described it to me in general terms. (In early 2004, McMaster had recruited him to be an adviser on Iraq.) Sepp said, "It was a product that seemed to be toning itself down. It was written as if there were knowledge of this bad thing, an insurgency, that was coming up underfoot, and you had to deal with it, but you had to be careful about being too direct in calling it an insurgency and dealing with it that way, because then you would be admitting that it had always been there but you had ignored it up to that point. It did not talk about what you had to do to defeat an insurgency. It was not a counterinsurgency plan."

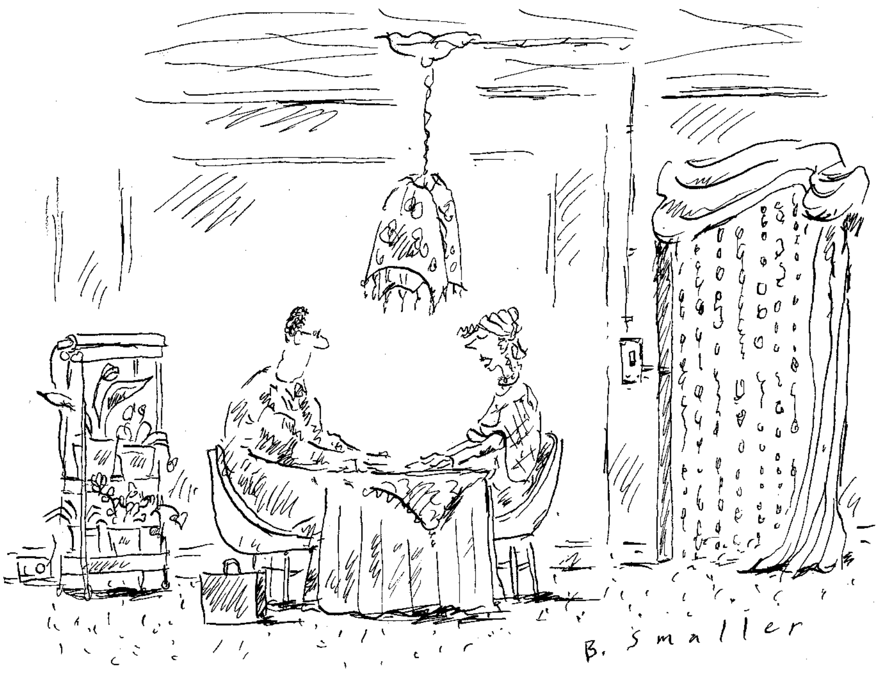
In the fall of 2004, Sepp went to work under Casey in the strategy division of Multi-National Force Iraq, MNF-I. In Baghdad, a small group of officers, led by an Army colonel named Bill Hix, worked with Sepp and two analysts from the RAND Corporation to turn the campaign plan into a classic counterinsurgency strategy that focussed, above all, on the training of Iraqi security forces, with American advisers embedded in Iraqi units and partnerships between the two armies.

By November, 2004, MNF-I had outlined a strategy, and the military command in Baghdad finally had a plan for fighting the insurgency. Much time had been lost, and putting the plan into effect in numerous units was a formidable task. Counterinsurgency, by its nature, is highly dependent on local knowledge and conditions. Changes had to be made at the level of the platoon, the company, and the battalion; the campaign plan helped officers catch up with what some local commanders had already learned to do.

By then, Colonel McMaster had arrived in Fort Carson, Colorado, and he had assumed command of the 3rd A.C.R. He had just a few months to get the regiment ready for its second deployment to Iraq. The unit ended up in Tal Afar—a place that was being called the next Falluja.

A WAR FOR PEOPLE

In Colorado, McMaster and his officers, most of them veterans of the war's first year, improvised a new way to train for Iraq. Instead of preparing for tank battles, the regiment bought dozens of Arab dishdashas, which the Americans call "man dresses," and acted out a variety of realistic scenarios, with soldiers and Arab-Americans playing the role of Iraqis. "We need training that puts soldiers in situations where they need to make extremely tough choices," Captain Sellars, the troop commander, said. "What are they going to see at the traffic control point? They're possibly going to have a walk-up suicide bomber—O.K., let's train that. They're going to have an irate drunk guy that is of no real threat—let's train that. They're going to have a pregnant lady that needs to get through the checkpoint faster—O.K., let's train that." Pictures of Shiite saints and politicians were hung on the walls of a house, and soldiers were asked to draw conclusions about the occupants. Soldiers searching the house were given the information they wanted only after they had sat down with the occupants three or four times, accepted tea, and asked the right questions. Soldiers filmed the scenarios and, afterward, analyzed body language and conversational tone. McMaster ordered his soldiers never to swear in front of Iraqis or call them "hajjis" in a derogatory way (this war's version of "gook"). Some were selected to take three-week courses in Arabic language and culture; hundreds of copies of "The Modern History of Iraq," by Phebe Marr, were shipped to Fort Carson; and McMaster drew up a counterinsurgency reading list that included classic works such as T. E. Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," to-

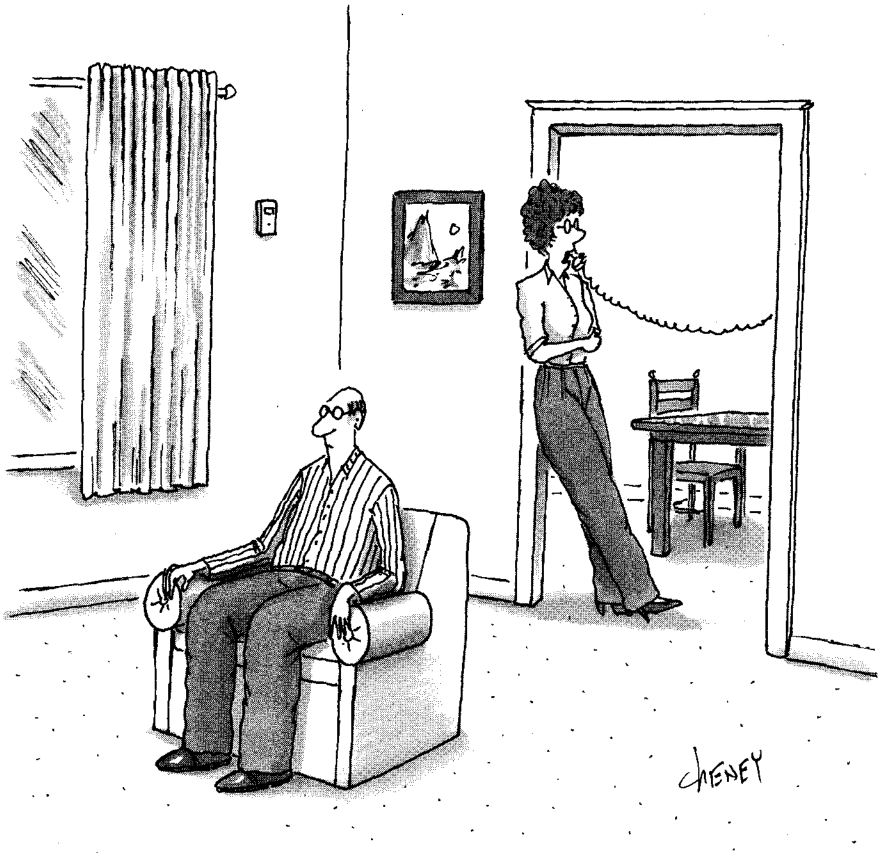


"You've lived many lives, all as an accountant."

gether with "Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife," a recent study by Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, a veteran of the Iraq war.

Sellars told me, "I don't know how many times I've thought, and then heard others say, 'Wish I'd known that the first time.'" The rehearsals in Colorado, he said, amounted to a recognition that "this war is for the people of Iraq." Sellars, who grew up in a family of lumber millers in rural Arkansas, described it as a kind of training in empathy. "Given these circumstances, what would be my reaction?" he asked. "If I was in a situation where my neighbor had gotten his head cut off, how would I react? If it was my kid that had gotten killed by mortars, how would I react?"

By the time two squadrons of the 3rd A.C.R. reached the outskirts of Tal Afar, in the spring of 2005, the city was being terrorized by *takfirin*—Sunni extremists who believe that Muslims who don't subscribe to their brand of Islam, especially Shiites, are infidels and should be killed. The city was central to the strategy of the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi; Tal Afar had become a transit point for foreign fighters arriving from Syria, and a base of operations in northern Iraq. Zarqawi exploited tribal and sectarian divisions among the city's poor and semiliterate population, which consists mostly of Turkomans, rather than Arabs, three-quarters of them Sunni and one-quarter Shiite. The mayor was a pro-insurgent Sunni. The police chief, appointed by the government of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, was a Shiite. His all-Shiite force was holed up in an area of high ground in the middle of the city known as the Castle, which is surrounded by sixteenth-century Ottoman ramparts. Unable to control the city, the Shiite police sent out commandos (McMaster described them as a "death squad") to kidnap and kill Sunnis. Outside the Castle, radical young Sunnis left headless corpses of Shiites in the streets as a warning to anyone who contemplated coöperating with the Americans or the Iraqi government. Shiites living in mixed neighborhoods fled. "The Shia and Sunni communities fell in on themselves," McMaster said. "They became armed camps in direct military competition with one another."



"We're making progress—he set off the motion detector this morning."

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McMaster's point man in the effort to stabilize the city was Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hickey, a squadron commander. Hickey, a good-looking man who has soft brown eyes and an aquiline nose, almost never raises his voice and seems as ordinary and steady as McMaster is intellectually restless and gregarious. He's the father of two girls, and it's easy to picture him at a parent-teacher conference. His soldiers spoke of him with reverence; a major in the squadron described Hickey as "the sort of quiet man who feels things very deeply," and Jesse Sellars spoke of his "tactical patience." Last summer, while American and Iraqi soldiers moved block by block into the city, encountering heavy resistance that often took the form of three-hour firefights, Hickey began to study the local power structure. For several months, he spent forty or fifty hours a week with sheikhs from Tal Afar's dozens of tribes: first the Shiite sheikhs, to convince them that the Americans could be counted on to secure their neighborhoods; and then the Sunni sheikhs, many of whom were passive or active supporters of the insurgency.

"The Shia freaked out," Hickey told me inside his cramped headquarters, in a derelict cluster of cement buildings behind the crenellated ramparts of the Castle. "'Don't we give you information? So why are you meeting with the Sunnis?' 'Because I'm trying to be balanced. I'm trying to stabilize your city. If I just talk to you, I'm not going to stabilize your city.' We tried to switch the argument from Sunni versus Shia, which was what the terrorists were trying to make the argument, to Iraqi versus *takfirin*."

Hickey's first attempts to persuade Sunnis to join the Tal Afar police force yielded only three recruits, but he did not give up. In painstakingly slow and inconclusive encounters, each one centering on the same sectarian grievances and fears, Hickey tried to establish common interests between the Sunnis and the Shiites. He also attempted to drive a wedge between nationalist-minded Sunnis and extremists, a distinction that, in the war's first year or two, American soldiers were rarely able to make; they were simply fighting "bad guys." At the highest levels of the Administration, the notion of acknowledging the enemy's grievances was dismissed as defeatist. But in Tal Afar I heard expressions of soldierly respect for what some Americans called the Iraqi resistance. "In a city that's seventy-five per cent Sunni, if you approach it from a point of view of bringing in or killing everyone who's had anything to do with the insurgency you're bound to fail," Major Michael Simmering said. "Imagine how many people in this town have picked up a rifle and taken a shot at coalition forces. Do we really want to try to arrest them all?" Lieutenant Brian Tinklepaugh explained, "You can't sever your ties with anyone—even your enemy. People with ties to the insurgents have us over for tea."

Hickey, during his conversations with sheikhs, was educating himself in the social intricacies of Tal Afar's neighborhoods, so that his men would know how a raid on a particular house would be perceived by the rest of the street. ("Effects-based operations," a term of art in counterinsurgency, rolled off the tongue of every young officer I met in Tal Afar.) He was also showing his soldiers what kind of war he wanted them to fight. It required unlearning Army precepts, under fire. "The tedium of counterinsurgency ops, the small, very incremental gains—our military culture doesn't lend itself to that kind of war," Jack McLaughlin, a major on Hickey's staff, told me. "There are no glorious maneuvers like at the National Training Center, where you destroy the Krasnovian hordes. It's just a slow grind, and you have to have patience."

At the same time, the 3rd A.C.R. engaged in frequent combat; ultimately, the regiment lost twenty-one soldiers in northwestern Iraq, and one platoon suffered a casualty rate of forty per cent. Last September, Colonel McMaster staged a push into Surai, the oldest, densest part of the city, which had become the base of insurgent operations; there were days of heavy fighting, with support from Apache helicopters shooting Hellfire missiles. Most of the civilians in the area, who had been warned of the coming attack, fled ahead of the action (unknown numbers of insurgents escaped with them), and though many buildings were demolished, the damage to the city wasn't close to the destruction of Falluja in November, 2004. "There are two ways to do counterinsurgency," Major McLaughlin said. "You can come in, cordon off a city, and level it, à la Falluja. Or you can come in, get to know the city, the culture, establish relationships with the people, and then you can go in and eliminate individuals instead of whole city blocks."

After McMaster's offensive, Hickey and a squadron of a thousand men set up living quarters next to Iraqi Army soldiers, in primitive patrol bases without hot water, reliable heat, or regular cooked meals. One afternoon, I walked with Hickey a hundred yards from his headquarters—past soldiers on guard duty warming themselves over a barrel fire—to the mayor's office, in the Castle. The new mayor, Najim Abdullah al-Jabouri, is a secular Sunni Arab and a former brigadier general from Baghdad, who speaks no Turkmen, Tal Afar's main language. The city was so polarized that the provincial authorities had turned to an outsider to replace the corrupt former mayor and win a measure of confidence from all sides. Najim, a chain-smoker, wore a dark suit and a purple shirt without a tie; his face was drawn and he had dark pouches under his eyes. On his wall hung a photograph of him with McMaster. The Mayor had written a letter to Bush, Rumsfeld, and Congress asking them to extend the 3rd A.C.R.'s deployment in Tal Afar for another year.

"If a doctor makes an operation and the operation succeeds, it's not a good thing to put the patient under the care of another doctor," the Mayor told me. "This doctor knows the wound, he knows the patient." He added, "Hickey knows my children by name."

I asked what would happen if, as before, the Americans withdrew from Tal Afar.

"What? No American forces?" The Mayor could hardly comprehend my question. "It will take only one month and the terrorists will take over. At a minimum, we need three years for the Iraqi Army to be strong enough to take control of the country—*at least* three years. You can't measure the Army only by weapons. It's building people, too."

The Mayor had once been tempted to join the insurgency. He lost his military career in 2003, when L. Paul Bremer III, the administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority—the American occupation government—dissolved the old Iraqi Army. "Bremer gave the order that whole families die," he said. "I decided that if my children died I would pick up my gun in revenge." But the dynamic in Tal Afar, where the U.S. Army seemed to be cleaning up after its own mistakes, had improved his opinion of the Americans. "I began to work with the Americans here and saw a new picture. I thought before that all Americans, like Bremer and the people we saw on TV, were killers and turned guns on Iraqis. But when I worked with them and saw them more, I realized they were different. Before, we were just sitting and watching Al Jazeera and believing it. Now I see it's a lying network."

The intensity of the Mayor's attachment to the Americans was understandable. They were in the same position, outsiders trying to hold the city together and persuade its tribes and sects to find a common national identity. I once saw Hickey ask a group of police trainees at a new station whether they were Sunni or Shiite, and when they started to answer he said, "No—Iraqi!" Hickey had seen the Mayor demonstrate the lesson to an elementary-school classroom.

Down the hall from the Mayor's office was a small conference room dominated by a thirty-foot table. Along each side, behind clouds of cigarette smoke, Tal Afar's notables sat grimly in tribal dress and business clothes: Sunnis on one side, Shiites on the other. It was only the second time the two groups had met in the Castle. The Mayor had told me that cold drinks were among his main negotiation tools, and everyone was sipping a Pepsi or a Sprite. The Mayor took his place at the head of the table. On the wall behind him hung a giant Iraqi flag.

The meeting soon deteriorated. There were complaints about the slow pace of rebuilding, the uneven distribution of contracts, the lack of government funds, and the inability of Shiite families who had fled Tal Afar to return to the mixed neighborhoods. "The rebuilding is something horrible," the Mayor said, in agreement. "But it contains a wonderful thing: it's not accepted by both sectors. So that's proof they can be united."

Shiite sheikhs accused the Sunnis of tolerating the presence of terrorists, and Sunni sheikhs accused the Shia of making unwarranted generalizations about them. "This is our second meeting, and we're saying the same things," a Shiite sheikh complained. "What is the point?"

"Sitting here is the point," the Mayor, relentlessly cheerful, said; I was beginning to understand his look of exhaustion. "It's wonderful that you are at least sitting together. We're supposed to have a meeting of the reconstruction committee, but the important thing is we should reconstruct ourselves—then everything will be easier."

A Sunni sheikh demanded, "If you want to make things better, why do you ask people applying to be police whether they are Sunni or Shiite? Asking will only consolidate the problems."

"We want to create a balance between Shiite and Sunni," the Mayor answered. "If the Sunnis come, believe me, after a while we won't ask this question."

After listening to the complaints of the Sunnis, a Shiite sheikh lost his temper and stood up to face the other side of the table: "The people who are fighting—where do they come from? They don't pop up from the ground. Some of you know who they are." The sheikh's father had been ambushed and killed on the way to a reconciliation meeting with a Sunni tribe. "Only Shia have these problems," he said.

That night, I visited the jail at a police station between Hickey's headquarters and the Mayor's office. Forty-seven prisoners were squeezed into a cell so tight that they had to take turns sleeping; four or five others were crammed into the latrine. When a guard slid aside a plywood sheet covering the cell's barred door, the prisoners, dazed and wide-eyed, protested their innocence and asked for blankets. One boy said that he was twelve years old. A fat, middle-aged man who claimed to be a teacher from Mosul told me in fluent English that he'd been arrested because a roadside bomb had happened to go off near a taxi in which he was riding. He hadn't seen a judge in a month, and hadn't seen a lawyer at all.

Next door to the cell, in an unlit room whose roof had partially caved in, offering a view of the starry desert sky, several policemen were trying to stay warm around a petrol burner. With one exception, they were Shiites. Police work was the only job they could find, they said; Sunnis had taken their old jobs. The chief, whose name was Ibrahim Hussein, said, "My wife and children can't leave the house." A slight young cop named Hassan said that seventy members of his tribe had been killed by terrorists, including a cousin whose corpse turned up one day with the head severed.

The policemen offered me the only chair in their squalid little room. One of their colleagues was sleeping under a blanket on the cement floor. It was bitterly cold. They said that they wanted the Americans to leave Tal Afar and create a perimeter around the city to keep terrorists out; inside the city, they said, the Americans were preventing the police

Iraqi security forces are dependent on the American military's supply system for uniforms, equipment, and even food.

"Would you mind if my new friend Ted joins us?"

from eliminating the terrorists, releasing most prisoners after just a few days. The men had been trained for two months in Jordan, and I asked whether they had been instructed in human rights. They said that they had studied the subject for a week.

"What about the rights of the guy who gets kidnapped and beheaded?" Hussein said. Hassan added, "If the Americans weren't here, we could get more out of our interrogations."

"You mean torture?"

"Only the terrorists."

"How do you know that they're terrorists?"

"Someone identifies them to me. We have evidence. The innocent ones, we let go."

"How many terrorists and sympathizers are there in Tal Afar?"

Hassan considered it for a moment. "A hundred and fifty thousand." This was approximately the number of Sunnis in the city.

When I got up to leave, the policemen begged me to ask Colonel Hickey for blankets and heaters.

The Tal Afar police were better informed about local realities than either the Americans or the Iraqi Army, but they were ill-trained, quick to shoot, likelier to represent parochial interests, and reluctant to take risks. "There are some police that would go after the Sunnis," Chris Hickey said. "So, yes, we are a constraint on them. Their head's not there yet." A soldier in the squadron, who was departing on a mission with Iraqi policemen to distribute food packages in a mixed area, went further: "These guys are worthless."

The American patrol bases around the city stand next to Iraqi Army battalion headquarters; this allows for daily conversations among counterparts in the two armies and frequent sharing of information. The Americans are not just training an Iraqi Army; they are trying to build an institution of national unity before there is a nation.

Hickey and other Americans spoke highly of Lieutenant Colonel Majid Abdul-Latif Hatem, an Iraqi battalion deputy commander. One evening, Colonel Majid invited me into his spartan quarters on the grounds of Tal Afar's granary, across a marshy field from the American patrol base. A Shiite from Nasiriya, in the south, he had a comically large handlebar mustache and mirthless eyes under droopy eyelids. In the corner of the room was a cot with a military blanket; on the wall was a map of his battalion's area of operations. As he began to talk, an orderly prepared tea in a blackened brass pot.

Colonel Majid, who had been in Tal Afar for a month, had an unsentimental view of the city's problems. "If we evacuated Tal Afar of Shiites or of Sunnis, it would be a calm, lovely city. The main issue in Iraq now is the sectarian one: one group wants to destroy the other group. The people need a long, long time, so that they can learn democracy, because they were raised on a sectarian basis. Second, to get rid of the problems we should divide Iraq into three parts: Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd. If there is one Iraq on the map, but inside the people are divided, what's the point of being one? The people are tired of war and instability—they just want to live in peace, even by dividing. The time of Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad is past. There are no more miracles."

Colonel Majid took out a piece of white paper and carefully drew the outline of Iraq, then carved it into sectors. "This area is Shiite," he said. "This area is Sunni: Mosul, Tikrit, Samarra, Anbar. Take oil from here"—he pointed to Basra and Kirkuk—"and give some of it to here. The Sunnis will have to accept. If the oil was in their area, they would ask for division."

I asked if the American and Iraqi armies could prevent a civil war.

"At any moment, there will be war between the two sects," he said. "I want to tell you the *truth*." He repeated the word in English. "Right now, you are observing the men of the Iraqi Army, and seeing what's on the outside. But I know the interior of them. My men are not coming here for nationalist beliefs, for one Iraq. They are here because they need work. So don't be surprised if they stand and watch killing between the people here."

We drank tea and talked, and, as the night wore on, Colonel Majid disappeared into the darkness; I could see only his mustache, his eyes, and the orange glow of the petrol burner. I asked if Iraq could be divided without huge population transfers and terrible bloodshed.

“How much do the Americans spend on their army every month here? Six billion dollars. One billion of this can build houses or apartment complexes in the south, for the Shia here up north. You have to offer many things if you’re going to move people: transportation, houses, jobs. It’s a very complicated situation, and I’m not George Washington to arrange everything for you.

“God says: no one can change the people if they don’t change themselves. America is the biggest power in the world, but it cannot get control over the explosions here and the insurgency. It cannot change the way people think.” He added, “Saddam Hussein brought all of us to the point where we all hate Iraq.”

I asked if Iraqi minds could change over time.

“Maybe,” Colonel Majid said. “But it will take years.”

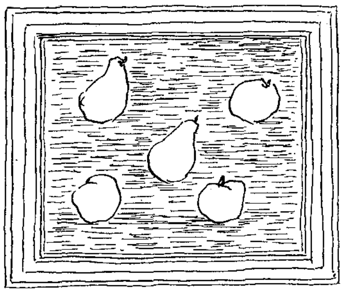
In Tal Afar, I began to imagine the Americans as sutures closing a deep wound. If they were removed too quickly, the wound would open again, and there would be heavy bleeding; at the same time, their presence was causing an infection in the surrounding flesh. This was a dilemma that required careful timing. It was also possible that the wound was too deep ever to be repaired. This would be less a dilemma than a defeat.

The Americans’ achievement in Tal Afar showed that, in the war’s third year, individuals and units within the Army could learn and adapt on their own. On my last night in the city, Colonel McMaster sat in his makeshift office and said, “It is so damn complex. If you ever think you have the solution to this, you’re wrong, and you’re dangerous. You have to keep listening and thinking and being critical and self-critical. Remember General Nivelle, in the First World War, at Verdun? He said he had the solution, and then destroyed the French Army until it mutinied.”

During the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment’s final weeks in Iraq, morale was remarkably high. Some soldiers expressed, almost under their breath, a reluctance to leave. Many of them had established strong bonds with Iraqis and didn’t want to abandon the work they had done together. They brought gifts for the Iraqis’ children when they returned from leave. The Iraqi Army units in Tal Afar had been watching McMaster’s men carefully, and were showing signs of competence, taking the lead in small operations, learning to win the trust of local civilians, and often proving more adept than the Americans at securing good intelligence. They still faced enormous logistical problems—they lacked armored vehicles and a reliable system of paying salaries, and their Ministry of Defense was so weak and corrupt that Iraqi soldiers still depended on the American military’s supply system to eat and to stay warm. As for the Iraqi police, they resembled less a neutral security force than a faction in the city’s conflicts. Nonetheless, the American soldiers in Tal Afar felt that they had achieved something. At the headquarters of Hickey’s squadron, in the Castle, young officers who, in the war’s second year, had concluded that the cause was lost now talked about a fragile success.

“If we’re not stupid, and we don’t quit, we can win this thing,” Major McLaughlin said. “History teaches you that war, at its heart, is a human endeavor. And if you ignore the human side—yours, the enemy’s, and the civilians’—you set yourself up for failure. It’s not about weapons. It’s about people.”

“If we are smart enough to see this through, we can win it,” Major Simmering said. “If we’re not careful, we could destroy everything we’ve done in the last six months in a matter of minutes by doing something stupid—taking an action that could alienate the Sunni population. It takes months to make somebody like you; it can take just a minute to make them hate you.” All the soldiers worried about what one general in Iraq called a “rush to failure.” As Simmering put it, “There’s a lot of political pressure back home to turn this over to the Iraqis.”



“A GOOD-ENOUGH SOLUTION”

From Tal Afar, I flew by helicopter to an airfield a few miles north of Tikrit, called Forward Operating Base Speicher. The headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division, Speicher is an “enduring FOB”—one of a handful of gigantic bases around Iraq to which American forces are being pulled back, as smaller bases are handed over to the Iraqi Army. Speicher has an area of twenty-four square miles and the appearance of a small, flat, modular Midwestern city; there is a bus system, a cavernous dining hall that serves four flavors of Baskin-Robbins ice cream, a couple of gyms, and several movie theatres. At least nine thousand soldiers live there, and many of them seemed to leave the base rarely or not at all: they talked about “going out,” as if the psychological barrier between them and Iraq had become daunting. After three months on the base, an Army lawyer working on the Iraqi justice system still hadn’t visited the Tikrit courts. A civil-affairs major who had been in Iraq since May needed to consult a handbook when I asked him the names of the local tribes. A reporter for the military newspaper *Stars & Stripes* had heard a bewildered sergeant near Tikrit ask his captain, “What’s our mission here?” The captain replied sardonically, “We’re here to guard the ice-cream trucks going north so that someone else can guard them there.”

Much of the activity at an enduring FOB simply involves self-supply. These vast military oases raise the spectre of American permanence in Iraq, but, to me, they more acutely suggested American irrelevance. Soldiers have even coined a derogatory term for those who never get off the base: “fobbits.” I spent two days at Speicher without seeing an Iraqi.

After Tal Afar, it was dismaying how little soldiers at Speicher knew about the lives of Iraqis. When I drove with the civil-affairs major into Tikrit, we stopped along the way at an elementary school, just outside the base. The major wanted to see if the teachers had pursued his request to have the children become pen pals with kids at an elementary school in his home town, in California. It sounded like a fine idea, but two nervous female teachers who received us in their office gave a number of reasons that the children hadn't yet written letters. The major pressed them for a few minutes, and then he was ready to let the project go. As soon as he left the room, the women showed me a thick stack of pictures that their students had drawn for the children in California, along with a letter from the teachers asking for school supplies and "lotion for dry skin." The letter concluded, "Good luck U.S.A. Army." But the women were too frightened to give the bundle to the major; a relationship with an elementary school in America could make them targets of local insurgents. All this was lost on the major. The teachers said that they rarely saw American soldiers anymore.

Speicher provides a more representative picture of the American military's future in Iraq than Tal Afar. The trend is away from counterinsurgency and toward what, in Washington, is known as an "exit strategy." Commanders are under tremendous pressure to keep casualties low, and combat deaths have been declining for several months, as patrols are reduced and the Americans rely more and more on air power. (During the past five months, the number of air strikes increased fifty per cent over the same period a year ago.) More than half the country is scheduled to be turned over to Iraqi Army control this year. This is the crux of the military strategy for withdrawal, and it is happening at a surprisingly fast pace. President Bush has always insisted that the turnover and "drawdown" will be "conditions-based"—governed by the situation in Iraq and by the advice of commanders, not by a timetable set in Washington. But everywhere I went in Iraq, officers and soldiers spoke as if they were already preparing to leave. A sergeant in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, said, "We'll be here for ten years in some form, but boots-on-the-groundwise? We're really almost done." He said that the U.S. Army doesn't allow itself to fail, and when I suggested that Iraq hardly looked like a victory the sergeant replied, "So you adjust the standard of success. For me, it's getting all the Joes home. It's not that I don't give a damn about what's going on here. But that's how it is."

A field-grade officer in the 101st Airborne said, "The algorithm of success is to get a good-enough solution." There were, he said, three categories of assessment for every aspect of the mission: optimal, acceptable, and unacceptable. He made it clear that optimal wasn't in the running. "We're handing a shit sandwich over to someone else," the officer said. "We have to turn this over, let them do it their way. We're like a frigging organ transplant that's rejected. We have to get the Iraqi Army to where they can hold their own in a frigging firefight with insurgents, and get the hell out." The Iraqi national-security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, who chairs a high-level committee in Baghdad on American withdrawal, gave the same forecast that was mentioned by a planner on General Abizaid's staff, at Central Command: fewer than a hundred thousand foreign troops in Iraq by the end of this year, and half that number by the middle of 2007.

In other words, "conditions-based" withdrawal is a flexible term. The conditions will be evaluated by commanders who know what results are expected back in Washington. I suggested to Senator Chuck Hagel, the Nebraska Republican, who has been a critic of the Administration's war policy, that this sounded like a variation on the famous advice that Senator George Aiken, of Vermont, gave President Johnson about Vietnam, in 1966: declare victory and go home. "In a twenty-first-century version, yes, probably," Hagel said. "It won't be quite that stark." The Administration, he said, is "finding ways in its own mind for back-door exits out of Iraq." He added, "We have an election coming up in November. The fact is, we're going to be pulling troops out, and I suspect it'll be kind of quiet. We're going to wake up some morning, probably in the summer, and all of a sudden we'll be forty thousand troops down, and people will say, 'Gee, I didn't know.'"

A senior military officer defended Generals Abizaid and Casey, and said that they would not simply bow to pressure from Washington. "I don't think commanders are so ambitious that they're willing to sell their men and their endeavor up the river so they can tell their bosses what they want to hear." But he admitted that there was considerable pressure for withdrawal, saying, "A blind man on a dark night can see people want the recommendation to be drawdown." The pressure is partly driven by the strain on the military, and partly by the fear that thousands of junior officers and senior sergeants, who face future deployments, may quit if the war extends many more years. Divorce rates among Army officers have doubled since the war began. The Army is so short-staffed that it has promoted ninety-seven per cent of its captains. "If you're not a convicted felon, you're being promoted to major," a Pentagon official said.

As Americans pull back to the isolated mega-bases, further reducing the daily death toll, Iraq will likely become a lighter burden for Republicans in Congress and for the Administration. A number of American officials, both civilian and military, along with Sunni politicians in Tal Afar and Tikrit, told me that this scenario was not only inevitable but healthy. Contact between Americans and Iraqis had led to mistakes, deaths, and mutual exhaustion.

But a good-enough counterinsurgency is really none at all. There is no substitute for the investment of time, effort, and risk that was so evident in Tal Afar. The retreat to the enduring FOBs seems like an acknowledgment that counterinsurgency is just too hard. "If you *really* want to reduce your casualties, go back to Fort Riley," Kalev Sepp, the Naval Postgraduate School professor, said. "It's absurd to think that you can protect the population from armed insurgents without putting your men's lives at risk." The policy of gathering troops at enormous bases, he added, "is old Army thinking—centralization of resources, of people, of control. Counterinsurgency requires decentralization."

Some military leaders are feverishly trying to institutionalize the hard-won knowledge from cities like Tal Afar, in time to make a difference in this war. At the training base in Taji, just north of Baghdad, there is now a counterinsurgency academy where incoming officers attend classes taught by those they've come to relieve. (Jesse Sellars told me that his main lesson to his successors was to educate themselves and their soldiers about the Iraqis.) Sepp sat in on a class led by General Casey, after which a newly arrived brigade commander said, "This is the first time I've been told my primary mission is to train Iraqi forces." Until then, he had thought that his mission was to kick down doors and haul people in. Many commanders in Iraq still think so.

In the first year of the war, Major General David Petraeus achieved a temporary success when, as a divisional commander in northern Iraq, he applied the basic ideas of counterinsurgency. He is now a lieutenant general and commander of the Combined Arms Center, at Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas. Petraeus is overseeing a group of active-duty and former officers in the writing of a new joint Army/Marine Corps counterinsurgency field manual. "It is, as with many things in life, much easier to explain than to do," he told me. "But it is very important to get that basic understanding right again, and the power of a field manual is its ability to communicate relatively straightforward concepts. The basic concepts and principles are not rocket science or brain surgery, but they can be very hard to apply." Counterinsurgency begins, he said, when military leaders "set the right tone."

In February, I attended a two-day workshop at Fort Leavenworth, where the authors of the draft heard suggestions from an assembly of critics. Petraeus had invited not just military and civilian officials but academics, journalists, and human-rights activists, and the workshop was co-sponsored by the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, at Harvard's Kennedy School—in keeping with the draft manual's claim that counterinsurgency is twenty per cent military and eighty per cent political. Also in attendance was Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, a British general who had just published an article in *Military Review*, out of Fort Leavenworth, which delivered an attack on the American military's cultural ineptitude in fighting the Iraqi insurgency. Aylwin-Foster, who had served under Petraeus in 2004, when Petraeus led the training mission in Baghdad, told me, "It seemed to be an enigma, the U.S. military as an entity. They're polite, courteous, generous, humble, in a sense. But you see some of the things going on—if I could sum it up, I never saw such a good bunch of people inadvertently piss off so many people." When Aylwin-Foster's article appeared, in December, General Peter Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, ordered it to be sent to every general in the Army; I saw it on a number of desks in Iraq.

The question hanging unasked over the workshop at Fort Leavenworth was whether it was already too late to change the military's approach in Iraq. When Kalev Sepp discussed the field manual with students in his class on insurgency at the Naval Postgraduate School, a Special Forces captain said, "If this manual isn't written soon, you'll have it ready just in time to give one to each soldier leaving Iraq."

CIVIL WAR?

Just as the Americans have begun to learn how to fight a counterinsurgency war, they find themselves in the middle of a growing civil conflict, and what succeeds in the former may backfire in the latter. Training Iraqi security forces and turning responsibility over to them makes sense if the Americans are trying to buttress an embattled government against insurgents; but, as sectarian violence rises, with the police and the Army dominated by one group, the Americans

"I hope you don't mind, but I stuck in a little prayer for General Motors."

"I dropped twelve pounds the first week and kept it off!"

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could also be arming one side of an approaching civil war.

On February 22nd, the Shiite shrine in Samarra was bombed, almost certainly by elements of Al Qaeda; its golden dome was destroyed. The sectarian violence that followed was widely interpreted as the first definitive sign that Iraq was coming apart, but Baghdad and the mixed towns around it had already shown clear symptoms of civil war. In the capital, Shiite families were being driven out of Sunni neighborhoods by a campaign of threats and assassinations. Young Sunni men were being rounded up by Shiite militiamen, some of whom wore police uniforms; they disappeared into secret prisons or turned up on the street, bound and shot to death.

Dora, a middle-class neighborhood of Sunnis, Shiites, and Christians in southern Baghdad, has become the epicenter of the low-grade civil war. A businessman from Dora told me that it began with the killing of barbers: Sunni extremists believed that shaving a man's beard was against Islam, and they extended the ban to Western-style haircuts. "After the barbers, they went on to the real-estate agents," the businessman said. A fatwa was issued, declaring that in the time of the Prophet there was no buying or selling of property. Then an ice vender was shot dead on the street because ice wasn't sold in the seventh century.

The next targets were grocery-shop owners, exchange-shop owners, clothing-shop owners. "At first, they were giving reasons, but then things developed, and they started killing for no reason," the businessman said. Every day in the heart of Dora, around the Assyrian Market, a list of intended victims—mostly merchants, and always Shiites—circulates by word of mouth. Within a few days, people on the list who don't take precautions are shot to death in broad daylight. Police at the local stations don't get involved, and American soldiers rarely enter the district, though the businessman said that he goes to sleep at night to the sound of gunfire, helicopters overhead, and bombs dropping, as if he were on the front line of a battle. "Dora is out of the government's control," the businessman said, and Shiites who can afford to escape are leaving.

A senior Iraqi official who has access to classified intelligence said that the campaign of violence is part of a strategic effort by Sunni insurgents to "shape the battlefield": to clear the district of potential enemies and use it as a staging area for attacks in Baghdad. Dora has an oil refinery and a power plant, and it lies along the route from the Sunni-dominated tribal areas south of Baghdad to the heart of the city. The killings in Dora, the official said, are part of a trend away from attacks on American and Iraqi military units, which expose insurgents to great risk, toward killings of local officials and ordinary citizens, intended to undermine the public's confidence that the government can protect it. In January, he said, there were seven hundred of these murders, the highest number of the war up until that month. "So 2006, maybe, will be the year of assassinations and infrastructure attacks," the official said.

The killings have created an atmosphere of sectarian hysteria that residents of Baghdad have never known before. Fear and hatred of one's neighbor are expressed in extreme language. I met a Shiite butcher, Muhammad Kareem Jassim, who owns a small shop on a busy thoroughfare, the doorway obstructed by the hanging carcasses of skinned lambs. His brother was also a butcher, with a shop in Dora. One morning in January, the brother was cutting meat for two women customers when a man walked into the shop, asked the women to excuse him, came up to the counter, and said, "Good morning." The brother looked up, said, "Good morning," and was shot in the face and killed. His grown son rushed into the room, shouting, "Daddy, Daddy!" and he, too, was shot dead. A second brother, also a butcher, came running from an adjacent shop with a carving knife in his hand; he was also killed.

When I sat down, ten days later, to talk with Jassim, a stout, bearded man in his fifties, he was hyperventilating with rage. "Dirty fuckers, sons of bitches—they have no faith, no religious leaders, since the time of Omar and Abu Bakr until now," he said of Sunnis, going straight back to the seventh century. "The only reason for this is that we are Shia." He expressed great bitterness that Sunni religious and political leaders rarely condemn the killings of Shiites, and he despaired of being protected by American or Iraqi security forces. The butcher's shoulders heaved, and he said, "If our religious leaders gave a fatwa, there would be no more Sunnis in Iraq anymore! Because everybody now has a broken heart. I wish I could catch them with my hands and slaughter them. I could do it—I'm a butcher."

In the past year, Shiites have begun to engage in deadly retaliatory strikes against Sunnis. Many ordinary Shiites have lost patience with the calls for restraint from religious leaders like Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. And Shiite party militias have taken up kidnapping and assassination, creating widespread fear among Sunnis for the first time.

The Iraqi Islamic Party is the country's largest Sunni party. Its headquarters, in western Baghdad, has a human-rights office with pictures on the walls of Sunni corpses bearing marks of torture allegedly inflicted by Shiites. While I was in the office, an elderly couple arrived in a state of panic. A week before, at six in the morning, fifteen commandos had broken into their house and taken their grown son from his bed. Since then, the parents had been unable to get any information about him. The woman described the commandos as members of the Badr Corps, the largest Shiite militia in Iraq, which was formed during the Iran-Iraq War by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. One of its leaders, Bayan Jabr, is now the Minister of the Interior; Sunnis accuse him of allowing Shiite militiamen to infiltrate Iraqi police forces. Sunnis routinely call Shiite politicians like Jabr "Iranians." The mother cried, "In all my life, I never saw something like this. They are coming from Iran, the Persian people—Iran, which is trying to get the nuclear bomb to destroy the world."

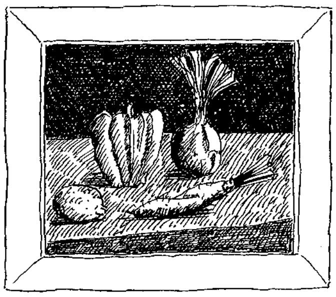
A Party official, Omar Hechel al-Jabouri, told the old couple that he would contact the Interior Ministry about the case, in order to prevent their son from being tortured or killed. Every day, he said, a hundred people come to his office with complaints, so many that he has taken to sleeping on a cot in a corner of the room. "Our brothers, the Shia, are very smart in crying about their suffering," he said. "We others are not as smart." (An American Embassy official told me that in Iraq each side has perfected its own "victimology.")

American troops have been struggling to purge Shiite militiamen from the Iraqi police and recruit Sunnis, with the goal of making it a non-sectarian force. Major General Joe Peterson, who is leading the police-training effort, said that the goal was to have two hundred thousand police trained and equipped by the end of the year. (As of mid-March, a hundred and thirty thousand had been trained.) "We captured a Shiite death squad last week," he said. "There are guys going out in the middle of the night." The squad, which was out to avenge the death of a member's relative, included twenty-two employees of the Interior Ministry. "We have some very bad groups out there who are bent on insuring that the government fails," he said.

An American intelligence official said that he considers the increasingly aggressive Shiite militias a bigger long-term threat to Iraq than the Sunni insurgency. These groups raise the prospect not just of a Sunni-Shiite civil war but also of an intra-Shiite fight, between the Badr Corps—widely perceived as a front for Iran—and the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr, the radical Iraqi populist. When I asked Colonel McMaster what Americans could do if a full-scale Iraqi civil war breaks out, he said, "Not a whole hell of a lot."

PLAN B

Fort Leavenworth has a Center for Army Lessons Learned. There is no equivalent at the White House or the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Last November, the Pentagon issued D.O.D. Directive 3000.05, which declared that "stability operations," or peacekeeping and security maintenance—which Rumsfeld had denigrated in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, questioning why the Pentagon had such a division—were now "a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support." The directive went on, "They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations." In the obscure world of "stability ops," D.O.D. 3000.05 was a historic, if belated, document. Careful readers noticed that it was signed not by Rumsfeld but by his deputy Gordon England. In February, Rumsfeld released his Quadrennial Defense Review, a congressionally mandated report setting out long-term military policy. Its language seemed unassailable, focussing on the need for greater capability in civil affairs, military policing, cultural and language expertise, and counterinsurgency, all as part of what the document called "the long war" against global terrorism. But in its budget choices, which reveal the real priorities of the Defense Secretary, the Iraq war had hardly registered. Instead of cutting back on hugely expensive weapons programs in order to build more troop divisions—Iraq has made it painfully obvious that a larger army is necessary for fighting counterinsurgency wars—the review favored the fighter jets and carriers that are the lifeblood of military contractors and members of Congress.



It's an open secret in Washington that Rumsfeld wants to extricate himself from Iraq. But President Bush's rhetoric—most recently, in a series of speeches given to shore up faltering public support—remains resolute. For three years, the Administration has split the difference between these two poles, committing itself halfheartedly to Iraq. (Through every turn in the war, the number of troops in Iraq has remained remarkably stable—between a hundred and fifteen thousand and a hundred and sixty thousand.) In 2006, maintaining the status quo no longer seems viable. The midterm elections and the President's flagging popularity will force Bush to make a choice: either he will devote the rest of his Presidency to staying in Iraq or he will begin a withdrawal.

In "Dereliction of Duty," McMaster's book on Vietnam, he described how Lyndon Johnson's top generals allowed the President to mire American troops in Vietnam with no possible strategy and no public candor. He wrote, "As American involvement in Vietnam deepened, the gap between the true nature of that commitment and the President's depiction of it to the American people, the Congress, and members of his own Administration widened. Lyndon Johnson, with the assistance of Robert S. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had set the stage for America's disaster in Vietnam." In Tal Afar, I told McMaster that there were more than a few echoes of the Iraq war in his book. He laughed and said, "I can't even touch that."

A President who projects a consistently unrealistic message of success to the public; a Defense Secretary who consolidates power in his office and intimidates or ignores the uniformed military; senior generals—Tommy Franks, John Abizaid, Ricardo Sanchez, Richard Myers, and now Peter Pace, Myers's successor as chairman of the Joint Chiefs—who appear before congressional committees and at news conferences and solemnly confirm that they have enough troops to win: the parallels between Vietnam and Iraq, in terms of the moral abdication of leaders, are not hard to see. In one sense, though, the two wars are inversely analogous: in Vietnam, Johnson claimed to be staying out while he was getting in; in Iraq, something like the opposite is happening.

TROY

We had a drink and got in bed.
That's when the boat in my mouth set sail,
my fingers drifting in the shallows of your buzz cut.
And in the sound of your eye
a skiff coasted—boarding *it*
I found all the bric-a-brac of your attic gloom,
the knives from that other island trip,
the poison suckle root lifted from God knows where.
O, all your ill-begotten loot—and yes, somewhere,
the words you never actually spoke,
the woven rope tethering
me to this rotting joint. Touch me,
and the boat and the city burn like whiskey
going down the throat. Or so it goes,
our love-wheedling myth, excessively baroque.

—*Meghan O'Rourke*

It isn't easy to know how much unwelcome information reaches the President. On December 16th, the day after elections for a constitutional government in Iraq, a group of senators and representatives met with the President and his top national-security advisers in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, while General Casey and Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, joined in from Baghdad on a large video screen. According to Senator Joseph Biden, the Delaware Democrat, who had flown back from Iraq that morning, Vice-President Cheney was characteristically sanguine about the war, saying, "It's been a great election, Mr. President—we're well on our way." The President talked at length about the need to continue fighting terrorism. When it was Biden's turn to speak, he said, "With all due respect, Mr. President, if every single Al Qaeda-related terrorist were killed tomorrow, done, gone, you'd still have a war on your hands in Iraq." On the video screen, Khalilzad and Casey nodded. When the discussion turned to the need for a political solution, with non-sectarian heads of the Defense and Interior Ministries, Rumsfeld began nodding vigorously—as if to say, Biden thought, "Hey, this is Condi's problem. This ain't my problem."

Condoleezza Rice now finds herself trying to win the kinds of fights with Rumsfeld that Colin Powell lost long ago. As Secretary of State, she has begun to repair alliances that Powell was helpless to keep the Administration from shredding. By most accounts, Stephen Hadley, her replacement as national-security adviser, is a weak figure in the White House, and Cheney's influence has waned in the second term, allowing Rice to consolidate foreign-policy decision-making in her department, as Powell never could. But Rumsfeld remains a formidable bureaucratic force. Recently, Rice and Rumsfeld have battled over the question of how to protect Iraq's infrastructure. Insurgents have become so adept at hitting pipelines, power stations, and refineries that fuel and electricity shortages have become nationwide crises; meanwhile, some Iraqi Army units and tribes that are being paid to guard these facilities are collaborating in the destruction. At the State Department, these attacks have become a full-time preoccupation. One official there described the strategy of Sunni insurgents this way: "The one thing we can do is strangle Baghdad, the crown jewel of Iraq. You don't have a country without dealing with us. You may have the oil in the north, Kurds—but how are you going to get it out?" For several months, Rice has tried to force a decision on whether to commit American troops to protecting key sites. Rumsfeld has resisted, and—as with so many issues in Iraq—the White House has made no decision.

The Defense Secretary has even objected to soldiers providing security for the small reconstruction teams that Khalilzad wants to establish in provincial capitals. (Rumsfeld insists that private contractors be used instead.) Final word on the mission has been held up at the White House for months. An Administration official said that the delay showed how badly reality can be "disconnected from the President's rhetoric of Iraq as the most important thing on the planet." The official went on, "Certain people at the Pentagon want to get out of Iraq at all costs." He added, "These provincial reconstruction teams should be resolved in an afternoon. But Rumsfeld doesn't want to do it, and nobody wants to confront him."

As a State Department official was preparing to leave for Baghdad recently, a colleague told him, "When you get there, the big sucking sound you'll hear is D.O.D. moonwalking out of Iraq as fast as it can go. Your job is to figure out how we can fill the gap." But the State Department has nothing like the resources—money, equipment, personnel—of Defense. It is having trouble persuading enough foreign-service officers to risk their lives by filling the vacant slots at the Embassy in Baghdad or on ministerial-assistance teams, even though raises are being offered; for a brief period, the State Department considered re-activating, for the first time since Vietnam, a policy of forced assignments.

In 1970, at the height of the pacification program in Vietnam, the U.S. reconstruction teams included seventy-six hundred civilians and military officials; in a country the size of Iraq, that would mean eleven thousand people, but barely a thousand positions are planned for the provincial teams in Iraq. The Administration asked an increasingly skeptical Congress for just $1.6 billion in reconstruction funds for the coming year, which means that, though the output of electricity, water, oil, and other utilities still falls well short of prewar levels, the major reconstruction effort in Iraq is now over.

In February, I met Secretary Rice in her office at the State Department. On one wall was an old recruiting poster, in which the pointing figure of Uncle Sam is saying, "We're at War. Are You Doing All You Can?" I asked Rice whether she would alert the President if she saw a rush to disengage from Iraq. "If I thought there was a drawdown that was going to endanger our ability to deliver a foundation for stability that outlasts whatever presence we had—absolutely, I would," she said. She quickly added that this isn't happening, and that the President won't allow it to happen: "Even though there is violence, there is a process that is moving, I think rather inexorably, actually, toward an outcome that will one day bring a stable Iraq."

Rice admitted that the American public is "uneasy" about Iraq. Speaking in her precise, academic manner, she analyzed one or two of the Administration's mistakes. But she kept falling back on the strategy of hope. I asked in several ways about the danger of civil war; her answer was that Iraq won't have one, because Iraqis don't want one. And when she turned to the larger questions about the President's legacy in the Middle East, Rice sounded almost mystically optimistic: "I think all the trends are in the right direction. I can see a path where this turns out as we would want to see it turn out." She narrowed her eyes. "I can see that path clearly."

At the Embassy in Baghdad, Khalilzad gave me the impression that he worries about the focus and staying power of the Administration, as if his own sense of urgency had to be constantly signalled to Washington. As the military draws down, he said, he isn't certain that the American effort will be redoubled in other crucial areas, such as education, or on the provincial teams. He was blunt about his fears for 2006. The U.S. will stay engaged in Iraq on one condition, he said. "The condition is whether we, the people who have responsibility here and in Washington, project to the American people that we know what we're doing: that we have reasonable goals, that we have good means to achieve those goals, and that we're making progress. I think the American people lose confidence when they think either the war is not important or we don't know what the hell we're doing. So it behooves us, those of us who believe that we know what we're doing, to communicate to the American people that there is a strategy that can produce results, and to communicate it effectively, without hyping." He added, "Happy talk is not the way to gain the confidence of the people."

The American strategy is for Khalilzad to push the Iraqi factions toward a government of national unity, so that political compromise will drain away support for the violence, while the Iraqi security forces become capable national institutions. Considering that just a year ago Sunni Arabs stood completely outside the political game, and the Iraqi Army was only a few months into a serious training program, the strategy has been at least partly successful; the high Sunni turnout in the December elections was a tribute to Iraqis' political maturity and Khalilzad's skills as a broker. But if a government forms and the violence—whether sectarian, insurgent, criminal, or some indistinguishable mixture of them all—continues at this extraordinary level, or even intensifies, the U.S. will have played its last card. Then there will be no more milestones to celebrate, only the incremental effort of fighting an insurgency and rebuilding a failed state, without the prospect of a dramatic turn that could restore the support of the American public. People with experience in insurgencies talk about five, eight, ten years.

Recently, Senator Biden noticed a change in the tone of Administration officials. After the Samarra mosque bombing, Stephen Hadley, the national-security adviser, called him to say that perhaps Iraqi leaders had "looked over the precipice" of civil war and would now pull back. What Biden heard in Hadley's voice was not the unshakable conviction normally expressed by White House officials. It was something closer to "wistfulness," he said—a prayer more than a belief.

In recent remarks, the President and Administration officials, such as Cheney and Rumsfeld, have made it clear that, in the case of an American defeat, they will have a Plan B ready: they will blame the press for reporting bad news. They will

"We structured the deal so it won't make any sense to you."

blame the opposition for losing the war. In mid-March, on "Face the Nation," Cheney, who has offered consistently rosy forecasts on Iraq, was asked whether his statements had deepened public skepticism about the war. "I think it has less to do with the statements we've made, which I think were basically accurate and reflect reality, than it does with the fact that there's a constant sort of perception, if you will, that's created because what's newsworthy is the car bomb in Baghdad."

In Congress, there has been remarkably little public pressure on the Administration from Republicans or Democrats to take drastic action, at least until the formation of the Iraqi government is complete. Among Republicans, though, the anxiety over Iraq is barely concealed—midterm elections are now seven months away—and has been expressed partly through criticism of the Administration on other national-security issues, such as wiretapping and the Dubai port controversy.

"Most Republicans know that they're connected to Bush and his fortunes and his poll numbers," Chuck Hagel said. "Iraq has been consistently the No. 1 issue in the polls." Since the call for withdrawal, several months ago, by Representative John Murtha, the Pennsylvania Democrat, members of his party seem to be content to watch in silence as the Administration destroys its domestic standing over Iraq. Three years into the war, there is still no coherent political opposition.

"There's an old saying in politics: when your opponent's in trouble, just get out of the way," Senator Barack Obama, the Illinois Democrat, told me. "In political terms, I don't think that Democrats are obligated to solve Iraq for the Administration." He added, "I think that, for the good of the country, we've got to be constructive in figuring out what's going to be best. I've taken political hits from certain quarters in the Democratic Party for even trying to figure this out. I feel that obligation. I'll confess to you, though, I haven't come up with any novel, unique answer so far."

After the Samarra bombing, when the prospect of civil war was added to an intractable insurgency, many Democrats and Republicans concluded that Iraq was lost. Conservatives like George F. Will and William F. Buckley, who, for philosophical reasons, never held out much hope for Iraq, have given up on the reconstruction. But most politicians remain paralyzed between staying and leaving, unable to decide which is the lesser evil. The deaths of more Americans and the spending of billions more dollars offer no promise of success beyond the prevention of wider chaos and, perhaps, a slow consolidation of the Iraqi state. Yet an American withdrawal would leave behind killings on a larger scale than anything yet seen; Iraqis from every background expressed this fear. Baghdad and other mixed cities would be divided up into barricaded sectors, and a civil war in the center of the country might spread into a regional war. The Shiite south would fall deeper under Iranian control, Kurdistan would try to break away, and the Sunni areas would go the way of Tal Afar at its worst. This is where comparisons to Vietnam do not apply: in Southeast Asia, the domino theory turned out to be false, but Iraq in the hands of militias and terrorists, manipulated by neighboring states, would threaten the Middle East and the U.S. for many years. The truth is that no one in Washington knows what to do.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE ALIVE
The 461st Month
You might find yourself taking all your mail and dumping it down the incinerator chute. Don't worry - it's normal.
NO
The 543rd Month
During this month, it's possible that you will hate everyone you've ever met. This will pass.
The 612th Month
Don't be alarmed if you should suddenly start to wonder — no, REALLY wonder - about everything. It's very common in your condition.
R. Chast

A former Administration official said, "All of us—not just the Administration but Congress and the American people—own the problem of Iraq. But I'm afraid we're going to cut. We're unwilling to make the sacrifice and spend the political capital." He summed up the three years of the Iraq war as three successive kinds of failure: "There was an intellectual failure at the start. There was an implementation failure after that. And now there's a failure of political will."

Beyond the White House, various analysts have offered alternative strategies, all of them based on the notion that 2006 is the year in which Iraq's long-term future, for better or worse, will be decided. Barry Posen, a political scientist at M.I.T., has offered a more radical proposal than any officials have dared to entertain. In a recent article in *Boston Review*, Posen concluded that a unified, democratic Iraq is highly unlikely and that American interests require a strategic withdrawal over the next eighteen months. Posen is known as a foreign-policy realist; when I met him at his office at M.I.T., he said, "I've been depicted as a villain. I just want the American polity to consider all sides of the equation before undertaking armed philanthropy." Posen has decided that America can afford to leave behind a civil war in Iraq—one that we will "manage" on our way out, so that its result will be, in his words, "a hurting stalemate." If one side seems about to win, the U.S. can tip the board in the other direction. "We managed a civil war in Bosnia from the outside," Posen said. "Whether we knew it or not, we were generating a hurting stalemate." In the end, after much violence, Iraq's factions will conclude that no one can win, and then they will come to their own arrangement.

Posen's version of withdrawal is realpolitik with a vengeance, offering the cold comfort of hardheaded calculations rather than grand illusions; but it's difficult to imagine how America, without troops in Iraq, could control events on the ground any better than it can now. When I asked Posen about the moral obligation to Iraqis, who will surely be massacred in large numbers without American forces around, he replied, "No one talks about the terrible things that can happen if we stay the course. The insurgents are trying for a Beirut Marine-barracks bombing." He added that he doesn't imagine his ideas will be heard in Washington. "These people are stubborn. A rational person would think that they've learned something about the limits of American power. They've learned nothing."

Kenneth Pollack, who served on the National Security Council under President Clinton—and whose book "The Threatening Storm" made an influential case for the war in 2002—recently led a small group at the Brookings Institution in writing a detailed report on a new strategy for Iraq. It calls for the Administration to shift the focus from the pursuit of insurgents in the Sunni heartland and, instead, to concentrate overstretched American and Iraqi forces in cities where the reconstruction effort is still somewhat popular—providing security while allowing economic development to flourish. This strategy, known in counterinsurgency doctrine as the "ink spot" approach (because zones of security gradually spread out from population centers), has also been proposed by the military expert Andrew Krepinevich. It was put into practice in Tal Afar. Pollack's proposal demands that, in spite of intense political pressures at home, there be no troop withdrawals anytime soon, since the total number of American and Iraqi forces is now only half of what experts say is required to secure the country. It also counts on a level of international help that the Bush Administration has never shown the ability, or the desire, to muster. In a sense, the report asks the country to offer the same commitment and imagination, to take the same risks and make the same sacrifices, as the soldiers in Tal Afar.

"PARADISE"

On a quiet street in eastern Baghdad, behind a garden with lawn chairs arranged in rows, there is a small, unremarkable two-story building. A sign in front, which says "Al Janna Center," is barely visible from the street, for reasons of safety. Al Janna means "Paradise," and Dr. Baher Butti, who directs Al Janna, had been warned by anonymous fundamentalists that paradise cannot be found on earth.

Dr. Butti is a psychiatrist and a secular Christian in his mid-forties, a small, stoop-shouldered man with thinning hair and an air of stoical gloom. I first met him in the summer of 2003, and on each subsequent visit to Iraq I looked him up. Over the past three years, he has grown increasingly skeptical about the motives of the Americans, Iraqi politicians, religious leaders, and the country's neighbors. Yet he pursued with great persistence an idea that had first come to him after the fall of Saddam: he wanted to open a "psycho-social rehabilitation clinic" that would rebuild the humanity of his countrymen. Dr. Butti believed that, after decades of dictatorship, wars, sanctions, and occupation, Iraqis need to learn to talk, to think, to tolerate. He had registered his proposal for the clinic with the occupation authority and successive Iraqi ministries, but none of them had given him support. Last year, a Baghdad newspaper owner donated funds, and in January the Al Janna Center finally opened.

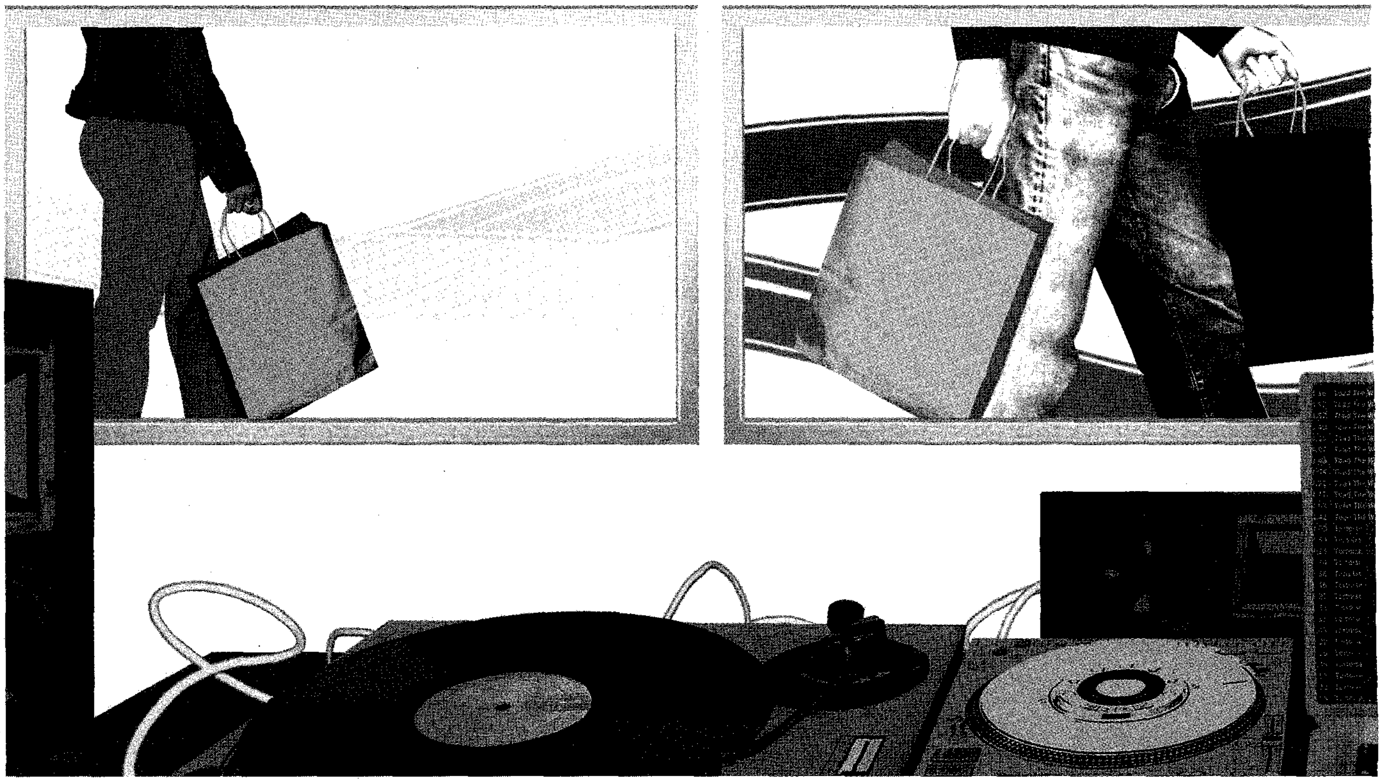
In the waiting room, brightly colored abstract paintings by patients hung on the walls. Up a narrow flight of stairs, there were several small meeting rooms where Dr. Butti planned to hold lectures, poetry readings, computer-training courses, and women's mental-health group meetings. The center was humble and barely furnished, but, amid the grinding ugliness and violence of Baghdad, it felt like an oasis of calm. "If we gain humanitarian care for our patients, then the rebound will be a humanitarian movement in all the society," Dr. Butti said. "This place is not just a scientific institute. It's also a place for literature and arts. We are trying to educate people about communication."

Dr. Butti lives in Dora, the mixed neighborhood in south Baghdad that has been particularly violent. "There are no direct clashes in the streets, but when every day you have one or two of your acquaintances killed, this is civil war," he said. Most of his friends and colleagues are leaving Iraq, along with much of the country's professional class.

When we sat down in his office, with cups of tea, he said, "Let me tell you about my own conflict." His conflict was simple: to stay or to leave. Last May, his young daughter was badly injured when her school bus was hit by a suicide car bomb. After that, his wife, who is also a doctor, insisted that the family move to Abu Dhabi. Yet Dr. Butti has finally achieved something tangible in Iraq, and to leave now would be like abandoning a child. "I feel like someone who's been cut from the roots," he said.

Dr. Butti's decision depends on what happens in the next few months, and on the formation of a new government. He doesn't have much hope for improvement any time soon, but he is looking for some sign of stability. "Or it will go into a civil war, and all will be lost, and there will be nothing to be done here anymore. It's either this year or none." He added, "Not one of the Iraqis believes that you Americans should leave tomorrow. Even the Sunni leaders—they announce it in the media, but that's for, let's say, public use. They know that we can't have the American Army leaving the country right now, because, excuse me to say, George Bush did a mess, he must clean it." He shrugged and smiled, in his pained way. "We are attached in a Catholic marriage with our occupiers. It's not possible to have a divorce."

He walked me outside into the sunlit garden. On the street, a car passed by slowly. For an hour, I had forgotten to be afraid, and now that we were saying goodbye I was reluctant to go. In the past we had always shaken hands, but on this occasion Dr. Butti kissed my cheeks, in the Iraqi way. Perhaps he felt, as I did, that we might not meet again for a long time. ♦



JOHN RITTER

ANNALS OF CULTURE

THE SOUNDTRACK OF YOUR LIFE

Muzak in the realm of retail theatre.

BY DAVID OWEN

If you blindfolded Dana McKelvey and led her into a retail store, a restaurant, a doctor's office, or a bank, she could tell fairly quickly whether the music playing in the background was Muzak. You may think that you would be able to tell, too, but unless your job is creating Muzak programs, as McKelvey's is, you probably wouldn't. The syrupy orchestral "elevator music" that most people associate with the company scarcely exists anymore. Muzak sells about a hundred prepackaged programs and several hundred customized ones, and only one—"Environmental"—truly fits the stereotype. It consists of "contemporary instrumental versions of popular songs," and it is no longer terribly popular anywhere, except in Japan. ("The Japanese think they love it, but they actually don't," a former Muzak executive told me. "They'll get over it soon.") All of Muzak's other programs are drawn from the company's huge digital inventory, called the Well, which contains more than 1.5 million commercially recorded songs, representing dozens of genres and subgenres—acid jazz, heavy metal, shag, neo-soul, contemporary Italian—and is growing at the rate of twenty thousand songs a month. (Some record labels now upload new releases directly to the company, which, like a radio station, pays licensing fees for the songs it uses.) The Well includes seven hundred and seventy-five tracks recorded by the Beatles, a hundred and thirty by Kanye West, three hundred and twenty-four by Led Zeppelin, eighty-four by Gwen Stefani, a hundred and ninety-one by 50 Cent, and nine hundred and eighty-three by Miles Davis. It also includes many covers—among them, versions of the Rolling Stones' song "Paint It Black" by U2, Ottmar Liebert, and a late-sixties French rock band with a female vocalist (who sang it in French) and approximately five hundred versions of the Beatles' song "Yesterday," which, according to Guinness World Records, is the most frequently covered song in the world.

"There are so many songs out there that if I listened to just one I'd never know whether it was Muzak or not," McKelvey, who is twenty-six years old, and has the kind of soft, persuasive voice that would sound good on late-night radio, told me. "But I could tell if I listened to the flow of a few. The key is consistency. How did those songs connect? What story did they tell? Why is this song after that song, and why is that one after that one? When we make a program, we pay a lot of attention to the way songs segue. It's not like songs on the radio, or songs on a CD. Take Armani Exchange. Shoppers there are looking for clothes that are hip and chic and cool. They're twenty-five to thirty-five years old, and they want something to wear to a party or a club, and as they shop they want to feel like they're already there. So you make the store

sound like the coolest bar in town. You think about that when you pick the songs, and you pay special attention to the sequencing, and then you cross-fade and beat-match and never break the momentum, because you want the program to sound like a d.j.'s mix." She went on, "For Ann Taylor, you do something completely different. The Ann Taylor woman is conservative, not edgy, and she really couldn't care less about segues. She wants everything bright and positive and optimistic and uplifting, so you avoid offensive themes and lyrics, and you think about Sting and Celine Dion, and you leave a tiny space between the songs or gradually fade out and fade in."

Muzak's corporate headquarters are in Fort Mill, South Carolina. Naturally, there's an awesome sound system, which extends into the parking lot but not (for deeply felt symbolic reasons) into the elevator. McKelvey works in a section of the building called the Circle, a curved arrangement of cubicle-size offices, which are the only Muzak work spaces that have doors. She has spent many hours behind hers, listening to hundreds of songs and thinking about how best to employ music to further the marketing ambitions of the hundred or so clients she manages at once. At the time I visited, she was working on a proposal for a prospective customer, a French-owned chocolatier in New York City. "They want the program to include music from everyplace in the world where cocoa grows," McKelvey told me. "It's a challenge, to say the least, but it's fun." Shortly before we talked, she had been listening to lounge and rhythmic music from Brazil and West Africa, and to a number of less exotic songs, including familiar jazz tunes that she felt conveyed a mood of chocolate-appropriate romance.

McKelvey, a creative manager at Muzak, is one of twenty-two "audio architects"—the company's term for its program designers. All but two are in their twenties or thirties, and all have serious, eclectic, long-term relationships with music. (Eight of the architects work in the Circle, ten work in the Muzak office in Seattle, two work in New York, and two work from home, in Connecticut and in California.) McKelvey was born in 1980 in Charleston, South Carolina. Her parents weren't musicians, but her mother liked to sing and her father worked as a d.j.; he now owns a night club in Charleston called Casablanca. McKelvey began playing the piano when she was two, could read notes on the treble clef before she could read words, and took up the violin when she was seven. Two years later, she joined the Charleston Youth Symphony, as a violinist, and performed through high school. At home, when she wasn't practicing classical pieces, she listened mainly to eighties pop—Michael Jackson, DeBarge, the Jets—and to the music her parents loved, which was Motown and funk. "I never had a TV in my room," she told me. "I always had a 45-player. My dad had an amazing record collection, and he still does, and it's all first runs, not reissues. Whenever I'm in Charleston, I try to sneak records from him." She says her current taste in music is too diverse to characterize.

People at Muzak sometimes speak of a song's "topology," the cultural and temporal associations that it carries with it, like a hidden refrain. When McKelvey works on a program for a client whose customers represent a range of ages—such as Old Navy, whose market extends from infants to adults—she has to accommodate more than one sensibility without offending any. The task is simplified somewhat by the fact that musical eras and genres are not always moored firmly in time. Elvis Presley

Background music is a kind of aural pheromone, attracting some customers and repelling others.

"Still won't start?"

(who is represented in the Well by fourteen hundred and five tracks) sounds dated to many people today, but teenagers can listen to Beatles songs from just a few years later without necessarily thinking of them as oldies.

Spanning musical generations can pose technical challenges. If a track that was recorded last year is played immediately after one from the forties, fifties, or sixties, the difference in texture can be jarring. (Anyone who has downloaded music onto an iPod or other digital music player is familiar with the difficulty of maintaining consistency from song to song.) One of the techniques used at Muzak is dynamic range compression, which consists of turning down the loudest parts of a signal and then turning up the entire signal; it's the reason that television commercials often seem louder than the programs they interrupt even though the commercials and the programs are technically limited to the same sound level. In addition, audio architects frequently use tracks as bridges between music from different eras—say, placing a Verve remix of a jazz standard between an Ella Fitzgerald classic and a recent release by Macy Gray. Tracks in the Well are catalogued not only by artist and title but also by producer, label, and date. Recordings from particular studios in particular eras often share a characteristic sound—like wines from particular vineyards and vintages—and some juxtapositions work better than others.

Covers can be useful when you have a range of ages, McKelvey told me. "You can play Vanessa Carlton and Counting Crows doing 'Big Yellow Taxi,' and it's relevant to young people today because the message is still meaningful and they know who Vanessa Carlton and Counting Crows are, but it's also relevant to their parents, who think, Wait a minute, I know this song—isn't that what's-her-name? They may not think of Joni Mitchell right away, but the song affects them because they listened to it when they were younger."

McKelvey studied marketing at Winthrop University, near Charlotte, North Carolina, and went to work at Muzak not long after she graduated. She told me, "The first time I explained to my mom what I do for a living, she said, 'They pay people to do that?' Most people walk into a store and hear music, but they never think that somebody actually put thought into what they're hearing. A song they like is playing, and they're nodding along with it, or maybe they're kind of dancing to it and maybe they don't want anyone to see that they're dancing. They don't realize that the song was put there for a purpose, and that there's a reason why they're doing what they're doing. But there is."

The company that became Muzak was founded by George Owen Squier, a career Army officer, who was born in Dryden, Michigan, in 1865. Squier earned a doctorate in electrical engineering from Johns Hopkins University, in 1893, and he later devised a way to transmit battlefield radio messages clandestinely by using living trees as antennae. In the early nineteen-hundreds, he invented a system of "multiplex telephony and telegraphy by means of electric waves guided by wires"—transmitting multiple radio signals along the outside of electrical, telegraph, and telephone lines. Squier realized that his invention could be used to deliver music, news, and other programming directly to homes and businesses. In 1922 (after helping to establish a predecessor to the Air Force, and running the Army's Signal Corps during the First World War), he sold a license to the North American Company, a public-utility conglomerate, which formed a new subsidiary, Wired Radio, to develop the idea. One of the first test markets was Staten Island. Wired Radio customers there were given a boxy receiver, which looked a little like a gramophone, and the programming fee was added to their monthly electric bill. In 1934, Wired Radio—following the example of Eastman's brilliant coinage, Kodak—changed its name to Muzak. Squier died the same year, of pneumonia.

As the quality and quantity of wireless radio broadcasts increased, eliminating the residential market for wired radio, Squier's company concentrated on selling background music to hotels, restaurants, and other businesses, many of them at first in New York City. (Muzak is probably called elevator music because soothing melodies were used in early skyscrapers to make people feel less nervous about stepping into a contrivance that looked like a death trap.) In the forties, Muzak introduced a trademarked concept, called Stimulus Progression, which held that most workers would be more productive if they were exposed to music of gradually increasing intensity, in fifteen-minute cycles. The process was said to be subliminal: Muzak affected you the way hypnosis did, whether you wanted it to or not. Only sanitized instrumental arrangements were used, because the absence of lyrics made the music less likely to intrude upon conscious thought. It was sometimes said that if the songs in a Stimulus Progression program were played in reverse order a listener would helplessly fall asleep.

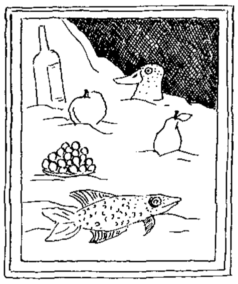
Stimulus Progression acquired a vast supporting apparatus of baffling in-house research studies and impenetrable charts and diagrams. It was pseudoscience, but it remained alive at the company until the late nineties, partly because it was a useful marketing tool and partly because it seemed so plausible: most people really were happier and more productive when there was something humming along in the background. Recorded music was "piped" into insurance offices, ocean liners, hotel lobbies, and department stores, and Muzak built a network of franchisees to spread its business further. Today, the company estimates that its daily audience is roughly a hundred million people, in more than a dozen countries, and that it supplies sixty per cent of the commercial background music in the United States. (Modern Muzak is delivered to customers by satellite, over broadband, and on high-capacity disks.)

Until the late nineteenth century, people usually had little access to music unless they made the music themselves, and even in the nineteen-twenties, when Wired Radio began, most people's lives were still tuneless much of the time. Muzak's early listeners didn't have clock radios, car CD players, MTV, home entertainment centers, in-flight hip-hop programs, satellite radio, or iPods, and when their telephone rang it didn't play the theme to "The Godfather." Muzak, for many people, was the first manifestation of a phenomenon that is now so familiar we scarcely notice it: the shifting, and frequently inescapable, soundtrack of everyday life.

In 1968, Yesco, a small company in Seattle, began competing with Muzak by offering businesses a product that came to be called foreground music: a program of popular songs that hadn't been transformed into symphonic mush. Foreground music violated all the central principles of Stimulus Progression.

Until the fifties, "Music by Muzak" and popular music had a great deal in common, and a number of the company's songs were recorded by the same big bands that played the hits on the radio. By the time Yesco came along, though, Muzak and popular music had diverged, and generational differences in taste were unbridgeable. When I was in high school, my father brought home a Muzak-like record called "The Beatles Songbook, Vol. 4," by the Hollyridge Strings. He meant the purchase as a gesture of conciliation, but from my point of view the album might as well have been called "Why We Are in Vietnam" (or, more to the point, "Why I Am Not Going to Clean Up My Room"). As popular music acquired its increasingly rich topology of cultural, political, and sexual associations, Muzak's bowdlerized hits seemed more and more like an affront. People began to use the company's name as a generic term for anything bland, soulless, and uninspired—so much so that today many don't realize that the word has a non-pejorative application.

Muzak was slow to adapt. It didn't introduce an original-artist program until 1984, and that program, called TONES, was actually produced by Yesco. In 1986, Marshall Field V, the Chicago department-store heir, bought the company, and the following year he took over Yesco and merged the two. Truly modernized Muzak didn't arise for more than a decade, when the company, which by then had another new owner, underwent a transformation that employees still refer to gravely as "the rebranding."



This big change was initially conceived by Alvin Collis, an unlikely agent of corporate revolution, who later became the company's senior vice-president of strategy and brand. He is fifty-three, tall, and extremely thin, and he wears a nearly unvarying uniform: nice black T-shirt, unfaded jeans, high-top sneakers, cool-looking wristwatch, designer glasses. Not long ago, we met in the courtyard of the Trump Tower, where he had just had a meeting with the marketing executives of a luxury clothier, which was considering hiring Muzak to create musical programs for its stores.

Collis, who recently left Muzak to become an independent consultant, is from Victoria, British Columbia. After graduating from high school, in 1970, he bummed around Canada and Europe for a couple of years, and eventually moved to Seattle without a green card. He thought of himself primarily as a post-punk musician, a performance artist, and a storyteller. In the eighties, he worked as a freelance sound engineer, and did jobs sporadically for Yesco, and then for Muzak after the two companies merged. Once, he and a group of other engineers were adding a musical soundtrack to a movie (a project unrelated to Muzak). They were working on a love scene, which they knew was supposed to make moviegoers cry. The first time the engineers watched the scene, though, they all laughed. "We were giggling like crazy, and I was thinking, This is going to be a problem, right?" Collis told me. The men spent the next three hours trying to find the right background song for the scene. "Finally, as one song was playing, I turned around and saw that all the guys in the studio were crying. These were all crusty old guys, and by that time we had watched that scene probably twenty-five or thirty times. Suddenly, I understood that the emotional content of a movie is driven largely by your ears. Your eyes can tell you what's going on in a scene, but it's hard to feel things through your eyes. Even if a movie has a really good director and a really good script and really good actors, if you watch just the raw footage, with no music, you think, Oh, no, it's going to tank."

Several years later, Collis was doing an engineering job for Muzak. He told me, "I walked into a store and understood: this is just like a movie. The company has built a set, and they've hired actors and given them costumes and taught them their lines, and every day they open their doors and say, 'Let's put on a show.' It was retail theatre. And I realized then that Muzak's business wasn't really about selling music. It was about selling emotion—about finding the soundtrack that would make this store or that restaurant feel like something, rather than being just an intellectual proposition."

In 1997, the company adopted Collis's concept—the main element of which he called audio architecture—essentially in its entirety. Muzak went through an exhilarating period of self-examination and redefinition, and moved its headquarters from Seattle to Fort Mill—mainly for economic reasons, but also to sever itself from its stodgy past. In a relatively short time, it transformed itself from a company that sold boring background music into one that was engaged in a far more interesting activity, which it called audio branding.

A business's background music is like an aural pheromone. It attracts some customers and repels others, and it gives pedestrians walking past the front door an immediate clue about whether they belong inside. A chain like J. C. Penney, whose huge customer base includes all ages and income levels, needs a program that will make everyone feel welcome, so its soundtrack contains familiar and relatively unassertive popular songs like "Kind and Generous," by Natalie Merchant. The Hard Rock Hotel in Orlando, which appeals to a more narrowly focussed audience, plays "Girls, Girls, Girls," by Mötley Crüe, and cranks up the volume. (Imagine how teen-agers would perceive the jeans and T-shirts at Abercrombie & Fitch—not a Muzak client—if those stores played country-and-Western hits.) Audio architects have to keep all this in mind as they build their programs. They also have to be aware of certain broad truths about background music: bass solos are difficult to hear, extended electric-guitar solos annoy male sports-bar customers, drum solos annoy almost everyone, and Bob Dylan's harmonica can make it hard for office workers to concentrate. Audio architects also have to screen lyrics carefully. They removed the INXS hit "Devil Inside" from many of the company's playlists after a devout Christian complained, and they are ever vigilant for the word "funk," which almost everyone mistakes for something else.

People often ask Muzak executives whether they worry about competition from the satellite-radio providers XM and Sirius, which carry a broad range of commercial-free music programs, divided among many genres. Bruce McKagan, who is Muzak's vice-president for music and voice, told me, "Satellite radio is great, but they don't do what we do. At Muzak, we take a brand and find music that is specific to what it's trying to accomplish in the marketplace. That's different from simply grabbing a channel and playing it." XM and Sirius both sell packages to businesses, but neither company offers the degree of customization that Muzak does. Nor can a business legally use a consumer broadcast of any kind as background music, unless it pays a licensing fee. (The same rules apply to digital music. The ninety-nine cents you pay to download a song from iTunes doesn't give you the right to play that song to customers over the sound system in a restaurant.) Muzak's main competitor is actually another commercial background-music company, called D.M.X.

Last March, at a trade show in Las Vegas, Muzak demonstrated audio branding on a large scale. The company's simple rectangular booth had a decorative theme for each of the show's three days: a red rose, a Martini, and an eight ball from a pool table. Dana McKelvey had designed a soundtrack for each day that was meant to evoke the theme musically. While the songs played—Etta James and Diana Krall for the rose, Frank Sinatra and dZihan & Kamien for the Martini, Blondie and Wilson Pickett for the eight ball—audio architects interviewed visitors, and used their answers to come up with a "personal audio imaging profile" for each one; later, back in Fort Mill, the audio architects used those profiles to create personalized CDs.

I went through the same imaging process during my visit to Fort Mill. Steven Pilker, a twenty-five-year-old audio architect—he had worked in a record store while in school at U.N.C. Charlotte and, when he graduated, was offered a job by a Muzak executive who had been a regular customer—asked me seven or eight questions, none of which had anything to do with music. ("When you're not working, what do you like to do?" "If you could choose an actor/actress to star in your biographical movie, who would it be and why?") A couple of weeks later, he sent me a six-song program, which contained nothing connected to what I think of as my main musical phenotype ("classic rock"); in fact, five of the six tracks were by artists I'd never heard of. Yet I liked all six very much, and later bought CDs by two of them (Sufjan Stevens and Jamie Lidell). Pilker's selections aren't definitive, of course; another audio architect surely could have had another take on my "brand." But I was struck that Pilker, after spending very little time with me, had created an appealing musical program that was based on his sense of who I was, rather than on any direct examination of the music I actually listened to if left on my own.

Some Muzak customers have specific musical requirements for their programs; Moe's Southwest Grill, for example, wants only songs by Roy Orbison, Jimi Hendrix, and other artists who are dead. Most Muzak customers, though, are "imaged" in much the way that I was, except that in their case the investigation is of their corporate self. Dave Keller, who is the creative director of the company's music department, told me recently, "Audio architecture involves looking at a client's brand, and then matching music to the attributes of that brand. In its simplest form, you use keywords to define a personality for the brand. You might say that it's bright, or energetic, or fun, or classic, or something like that. And then you find music with a subtext that reinforces that personality. This all really comes from Alvin Collis's vision." Collis himself said, "If you ask a client, 'What kind of music do you like?' the answer doesn't get you anywhere, because musical taste is very subjective and very personal. You want the client to be thinking, Is this the right emotion for my brand?"

When the fit is right, the effect can be memorable. At a cocktail party in Manhattan recently, I met a man who told me that he had loved the music playing in a particular restaurant, and had asked his waitress where it had come from. "I said, 'This is the best radio station I ever heard—what is it?' And she said, 'It's not a radio station; it's Muzak.'"

In the late nineties, when the Muzak rebranding was under way, Collis and another executive set a private goal of securing the Gap as a Muzak customer. Such an association was unthinkable initially: Muzak was the lamest kid in the class, and the Gap was one of the most astute and brand-aware marketers in the world. But Collis felt that Muzak would have a chance if it could first establish a successful record with smaller specialty retailers. It eventually succeeded, and today the four Gap brands play customized Muzak programs in all their stores. (In ascending order of volume and boisterous musical energy, those brands are Forth & Towne, Banana Republic, the Gap, and Old Navy.)

After Collis and I had talked for a while, we walked across Fifth Avenue to the Gap store at the corner of Fifty-fourth Street. The first thing he noticed was that the music we were hearing wasn't Muzak, it was the audio track of an in-house video advertising program, which was playing on a bank of plasma-screen monitors suspended from the store's high ceiling. In a few minutes, the Muzak program resumed—with "Soul Meets Body," by Death Cab for Cutie—and Collis and I moved deeper into the store, where we studied the speakers. Muzak prefers to use sound equipment manufactured by two companies, Bose and Klipsch, and it designs systems depending on the customer and the musical genre. Collis said, "If you are a company that sells candles, you want an experience that's moody, low light, and very organic, and so you want a sound system that kind of envelops you. If you walked in, you wouldn't see a speaker, whereas when you come into an environment that's more youth-oriented, like this one, the speakers are right there, and they aim the music at you, so that you feel it and get a real sense of where it's coming from. And at Old Navy the music would be even more in your face."

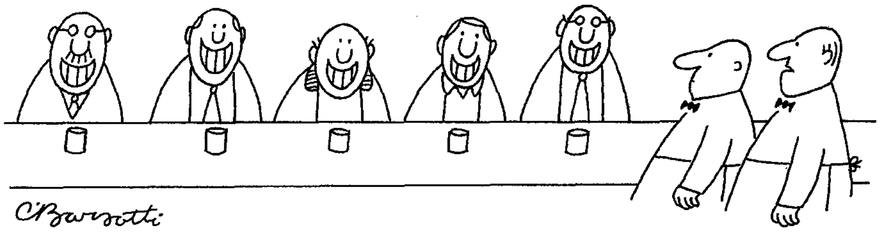
Muzak's audio architects do something analogous within programs, too: some customers want to establish different moods at different times of the day; some want current hits to repeat frequently, as they do on Top Forty radio stations; some want programs that are closely geared to the seasons. At some retailers, one of the biggest changes occurs at closing time, when the music becomes louder, more intense, and presumably more likely to include lyrics that could be mistaken for profanity. That's an after-hours program, designed by Muzak's audio architects for employees who restock the shelves.

When Muzak undertook its corporate makeover, executives had to decide whether to change the company's name, which by then had acquired a surplus of what marketing types call negative equity. In the end, despite reservations, they elected to keep it and rehabilitate it—perhaps the ultimate audio-imaging challenge.

Background music is a tough business under any circumstances. Muzak—which is privately owned, although its bonds trade publicly—has lost money for a number of years. The company has tried many times to broaden its business, with mixed results. After September 11th, it made a major effort to sell closed-circuit-television security systems, but that enterprise proved almost immediately to be a dead end. (Collis told me, "With audio branding, you're selling emotion, love, caring, feelings. With CCTV, you're selling fear. Not a good combination.") Other ventures have turned out better. Muzak has a large and profitable "on hold" business, which creates music-and-voice programming for commercial telephone systems. The voice division also creates in-store promotional announcements, which can be patched seamlessly into the company's background-music programs. All in all, Muzak creates about thirty thousand voice spots a month. It also provides the drive-through ordering systems used by many fast-food restaurants.

The company's most interesting effort to redefine its brand may be one that isn't meant to be profitable. It's the Muzak Heart & Soul Foundation, which contributes money to music-education programs around the country and conducts an annual summer camp called Noise!, whose purpose is to introduce musically inclined teen-agers to the less visible parts of the music business. LaFouji Alexander, a thirty-year-old audio architect, thinks Heart & Soul is "the cornerstone of the company." (When I asked him to explain his last job, as a Muzak "music specialist," he said, "Maybe a Chinese restaurant wants only a certain kind of traditional Chinese music, and if that means I have to order it from Tibet . . . ") Most teen-agers, he said, have a distorted view of the commercial music world. "Shows like 'American Idol' give them the wrong idea," he said. "Music isn't just stars; there's this whole huge industry behind them." Campers at Noise! visit recording studios, meet professional musicians and industry executives, make business contacts that may be useful after college, and—not incidentally—develop favorable associations with the name Muzak. Alexander said, "I tell my boss all the time that if we directed more outreach toward the kids, doing more of the things that Heart & Soul does, we wouldn't have a problem convincing America who we are."

During Muzak's early decades, office workers and others sometimes complained that public background music was an invasion of privacy. Some people feel that way today, although the first thing many of us do when we find ourselves alone with our thoughts is to reach for the handiest means of drowning them out—by putting on a pair of headphones, say, or by sliding a disk into the car's CD player. Audio architecture is a compelling concept because the human response to musical accompaniment is powerful and involuntary. "Our biggest competitor," a member of Muzak's marketing department told me, "is silence." ♦

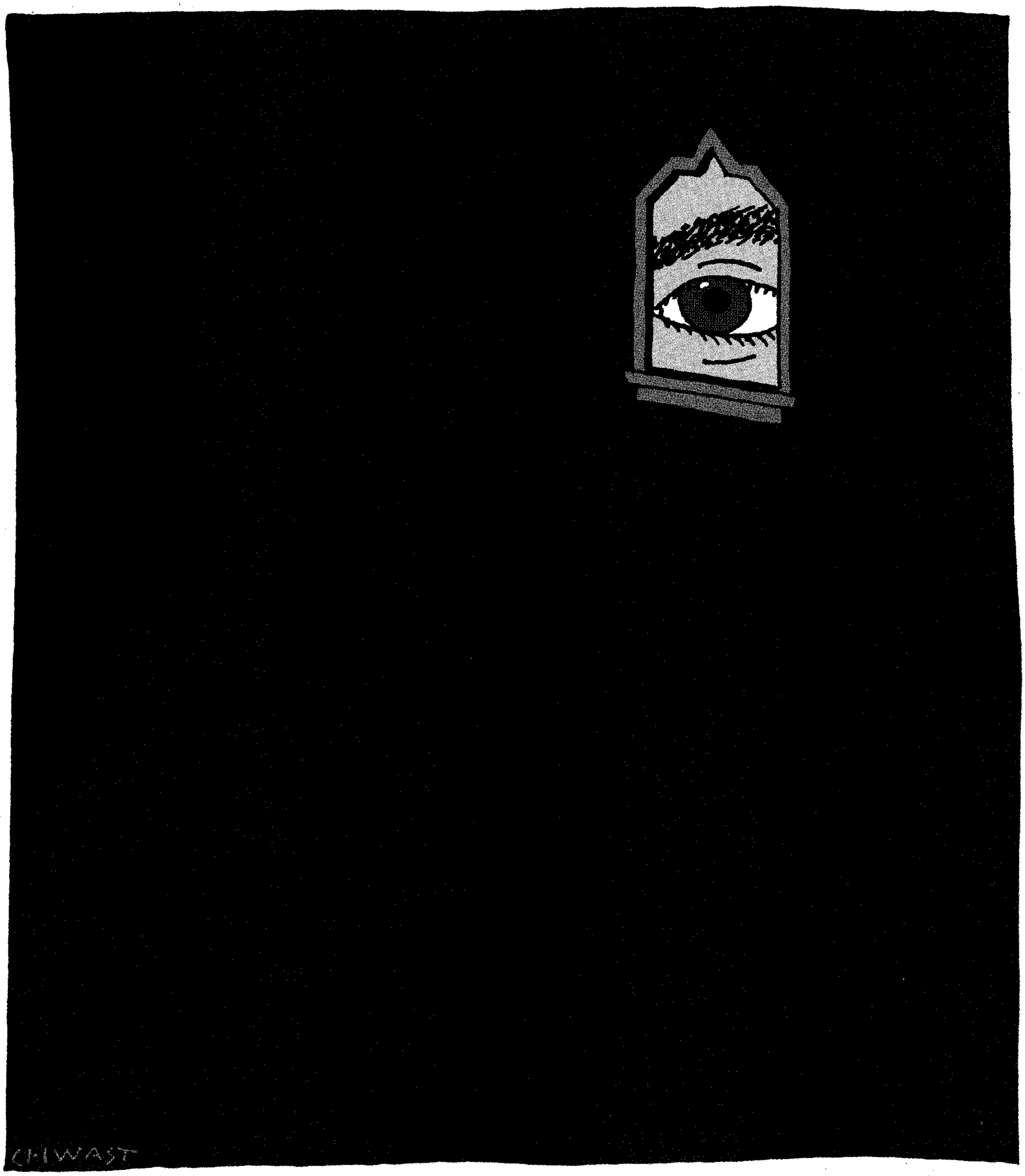


"Happy hour is beginning to scare the bejeezus out of me."

FICTION

IN THE REIGN OF HARAD IV

BY STEVEN MILLHAUSER



In the reign of Harad IV there lived at court a maker of miniatures, who was celebrated for the uncanny perfection of his work. Not only were the objects of his strenuous art pleasing to look at but the pleasure and astonishment increased as the observer, bending closer, saw that a passionate care had been lavished on the smallest and least visible details. It was said that no matter how closely you examined one of the Master's little pieces you always discovered some further wonder.

Among the many tasks of the maker of miniatures was supplying court ladies with carved ivory plants and triple-headed sea monsters for their cabinets of delight, drawing the fur and feathers of fabulous creatures in the "Book of Three Hundred Secrets," and, above all, replacing the furnishings of the old toy palace, which the King had inherited from his father, and which was filled with moldering draperies and cracked wood. The famous toy palace, with its more than six hundred rooms, its dungeons and secret passageways, its gardens and courtyards and orchards, rose to the height of a man's chest and occupied its own chamber, across from the King's library. In return for his duties the maker of miniatures was given a private apartment in the palace, not far from the court carpenter, as well as an ermine robe that entitled him to take part in official ceremonies. He was assisted by two youthful apprentices. They roughed out the larger miniatures, such as cupboards and canopy beds, fired the little earthenware bowls in a special kiln, applied the first coat of lacquer to objects made of wood, and saved precious time for the Master by fetching from the palace workshops pieces of ivory, copper, lapis, boxwood, and beechwood. But the apprentices were not permitted to attempt the more difficult labors of the miniaturist's art, such as carving the dragon heads at the feet of table legs, or forging the minuscule copper keys that turned the locks of drawers and chests.

One day after the completion of an arduous and exhilarating task—he had made for one of the miniature orchards a basket of brilliantly lifelike red-and-green apples, each no larger than the pit of a cherry, and as a finishing touch he had placed on the stem of one apple a perfectly reproduced copper fly—the maker of miniatures felt in himself a stirring of restlessness. It wasn't the first time he had experienced such stirrings at the end of a long task, but lately the odd, internal itching had become more insistent. As he tried to penetrate the feeling, to reveal it more clearly to himself, he thought of the basket of apples. The basket had been unusually satisfying to make, because it had presented him with a hierarchy of sizes: the basket itself, composed of separate slats of boxwood bound with copper wire, then the apples, and, at last, the fly. The tiny fly, with its precisely rendered wings, had caused him the most difficulty and the most joy, and it occurred to him that there was no particular reason to stop at the fly. Suddenly, he was seized by an inner trembling. Why had he never thought of this before? How was it possible? Didn't logic itself demand that the downward series be pursued? At this thought he felt a deep, guilty excitement, as if he had come to a forbidden door at the end of a private corridor and heard, as he slowly turned the key, a sound of distant music.

He set out to make an apple basket the size of one of his apples. The new wooden apples, each with a stem and two leaves, were so small that he was able to carve them only with the aid of an enlarging glass, which he set into a supporting frame. But even as he struggled pleasurably over each apple he realized that he was dreaming of the fly, the impossible fly that, as it turned out, was visible only as a speck on the minuscule stem, though it was perfect in every detail when viewed through the glass.

The King, who had praised the original fly, looked at the new basket of apples with astonished delight. When the Master invited him to observe the apples through the glass, the King drew in his breath, appeared to be about to speak, and suddenly clapped his hands sharply, whereupon the Chamberlain strode in. The King instructed him to view the miniature fly through the lens. The Chamberlain, a cold and imperious man, gave a harsh gasp. By the next morning the story of the invisible fly was known throughout the palace.

With new zest, as if he were returning to an earlier and more exuberant period of his life, the middle-aged but still vigorous Master devoted himself to a series of miniatures that in every way surpassed his finest efforts of the past. From the pit of a cherry he carved a ring of thirty-six elephants, each holding in its trunk the tail of the elephant before it. Every elephant possessed a pair of nearly invisible tusks carved out of ivory. One day, the Master presented to the King a saucer on which stood an inverted ebony thimble. When the King picked up the thimble, he discovered beneath it a meticulous reproduction of the northwest wing of his toy palace, with twenty-six rooms fully furnished, including a writing table with ostrich-claw legs and a gold birdcage containing a nightingale.

Scarcely had the maker of miniatures completed the thimble palace when he felt a new burst of restlessness. Once embarked on his downward voyage, would he ever be able to stop? Besides, wasn't it plain that the tiny palace, though but partially visible to the unaided eye, revealed itself too readily, without that resistance which was an essential part of aesthetic delight? And he proposed to himself a plunge beneath the surface of the visible, the creation of a detailed world wholly inaccessible to the naked eye.

He began with simple things—a copper bowl, a beechwood box—for the material he worked with was, before magnification, itself invisible and required of him a new degree of delicate manipulation. He quickly recognized the need for more powerful lenses, more subtle tools. From the court carpenter, he ordered a pair of complex gripping devices that held his hands still and steadied his fingers. This was no work for an old man, he thought—no, or for a young man, either—but only for someone in the full vigor of his middle years.

His first masterpiece in the realm of the invisible was a stag with branching antlers. Through a powerful glass he watched the invisible sharpen into the visible: the head twisted to one side, the mouth slightly open, the lips drawn back to reveal the teeth. He carved it and painted it down to the last detail, tooth and hoof and pale inner ear; and it was said by some that, if you looked very closely through the enlarging glass, you could distinguish the amber irises from the bright black pupils.

No sooner had he finished the stag than he embarked on a far more challenging task: an invisible garden, modelled at first on one of the thirty-nine palace gardens but quickly developing its own, more elaborate design. During the

SEYMOUR CHWAST

early stages a sudden draft destroyed a week's worth of work. With the aid of the court carpenter, for whom he drew up a plan, the maker of miniatures constructed a teakwood box with a sloping top, in which was set a square magnifying lens. Two panels in the sides of the box slid smoothly up and down, so that a pair of hands might be inserted, and the square lens, attached to a system of rods and screws, could be raised and lowered. The intricate and delicate garden, protected from disturbing currents of air, grew slowly until it contained dozens of twelve-sided flower beds, fourteen varieties of fruit tree with individual leaves, a system of crossing paths paved with tesserae of ebony and ivory, onyx fountains carved with legendary creatures, snails under stones.

Although the King expressed wonder and amazement at the garden seen through the glass, and praised the Master's conquest of a new world, he asked many questions about the lens and the teakwood box, as if he suspected them of working a spell. At last the King permitted himself to wonder whether his maker of miniatures might not soon return to the visible miracle of his exquisite palace furniture. In the King's voice the Master heard a tone of unmistakable reproach. As he explained the apparatus and adjusted the lens, it seemed to him that by venturing beyond the visible world he had embarked on a voyage more perilous than he had known.

But already he had thrown himself into the crowning masterpiece of this period: the King's famous toy palace, entirely invisible to the naked eye. The more than six hundred rooms would be completely furnished and scrupulously rendered in every detail, including dovetail joints in the cabinets, working locks on the drawers, and fifteen dozen complete sets of knives, forks, and spoons in chased silver, each with the royal insignia—a crown and crossed swords—worked onto the handle.

During the construction of his palace-beneath-the-glass, the maker of miniatures paid several visits to the original toy palace, and was startled each time by the vast building that towered almost to the height of his shoulders. The chairs in the council chamber were the size of his fists. Ever since his own work had taken its slight and necessary turn, its odd, unaccountable swerve away from classic smallness toward another, more dubious realm, his two apprentices had assumed the task of supplying furniture for the King's toy palace. And the Master saw that it was good: they were well suited to large and striking effects; he had perhaps been unduly harsh in limiting them to elementary tasks, in the days when such things concerned him.

One day, while looking at a desk in the King's toy palace, the maker of miniatures fell into a reverie. Fastened to the drawer of the desk was a pair of brass lion's-head handles, which had once seemed to him the height of elegance and had cost him three days of work. The smallest object in the toy palace was a silver needle no thicker than a hair. It occurred to him, not without pride, that the entire palace he was now constructing beneath his glass, with its more than six hundred rooms and its gardens and orchards, could be enclosed by the eye of that needle.

But even as he sank deeply into his little world he felt at the back of his mind a slight itching, as if he knew that his palace, even that, could not satisfy him for long. For such a feat, however arduous, was really no more than the further conquest of a familiar realm, the twilight realm of the world revealed by his glass, and he yearned for a world so small that he could not yet imagine it. As he worked on his palace the craving grew in him, and he seemed to sense dimly, just out of reach beyond his inner sight, a farther kingdom.

He began to see it more clearly, with growing excitement, though he confessed to himself that it was less a seeing than a desire gradually hardening into a certainty. Although he now worked with material so minute that it was invisible to the unaided eye, it remained true that the invisible was made visible by his lens. If to others he seemed a magician who brought the seen out of the unseen, in fact he worked wholly in the visible world. It was an ambiguous and elusive world, which vanished into the invisible as soon as the glass was removed, and yet it was a far cry from the purely invisible realm he sensed just beyond. And he longed to construct objects so small that they would escape the power of the mediating glass, re-

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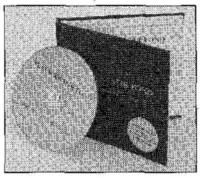

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main submerged in the dark kingdom of the invisible.

He began as always with a simple object: an oblong ivory box with a sliding top. Although the box was so marvellously small that it remained invisible even through the glass, he continued to make use of his teakwood viewer with the sloping top and movable lens, for the familiar apparatus served to concentrate his attention and steady his fingers. The ivory box, which never once emerged from its hidden world to reveal itself to the eye of the Master, was completed in seven days. With his inner eye, he contemplated it coolly and felt a calm elation. Despite the absence of visible evidence, he was certain of its formal perfection, of the elegant precision of its parts—never had he taken so much care.

Immediately he threw himself into a more ambitious task: a beechwood peacock with outspread tail. The enchanting peacock, radiant with unseen colors, took him nearly three weeks, and when he was done he felt ready for the task he had secretly been preparing for: an imaginary kingdom.

And so he set to work on his invisible kingdom, with its walled cities and winding rivers, its forests of beech and fir, its copper mines and temple towers, its spoons and insects. By the end of a year he had completed a single city. The city contained cobbled streets and market squares, baskets of grapes on the fruit sellers' stands, merchants' houses with pillared balconies overlooking courtyards, individual bottles in the glassblowers' shops. He felt tired and exhilarated, and as he imagined all that remained undone, stretching out before him like an immense adventure, he found himself wishing that he could reveal his work to someone, as he had once been able to do. The solitude of his task was never oppressive, but from time to time, in the pauses of his day, he felt a touch of loneliness. The King no longer summoned him, and his apprentices had moved into an adjoining chamber and taken on apprentices of their own.

One afternoon, when he was deep-sunk in his invisible kingdom, there was a rap at the door of his chamber. Half raising his head from the teakwood box, the maker of miniatures called for the visitor to enter. The door opened to admit two of the four new apprentices. They began by apologizing for disturbing the Master at work, but explained that they had long admired his unsurpassed art and could not resist the desire to pay their respects and to beg for news of his latest work, of which they had heard confused and contradictory reports. Their own work was still crude and trifling, they had scarcely the skill with which to fashion the leg of a table, and they hoped that a visit to the Master would instruct and inspire them. The Master knew at once that the apprentices, who were both quite young, were very sure of themselves and were belittling themselves only out of courtly politeness, but the loneliness of his last months was soothed by their words of homage. Giving way to temptation, he moved aside to permit them to view his kingdom through the glass. True, they would be able to see nothing, for he had dropped fully beneath the floor of the visible, but perhaps they could somehow sense, as he could in the darkest depths of his mind, the splendor and precision of his invisible art.

The first apprentice bent over the glass in the sloping top of the teakwood box. After a few moments he stepped aside and allowed the second apprentice to bend over the glass. When both had done looking, the younger of the two said that the Master's work was indeed incomparable. Never in his short life had he seen anything so remarkable in both conception and execution. At once, the second apprentice gave voice to his admiration, saying that even in his dreams he had not dared to imagine such loveliness. And, indeed, it was the highest of all honors simply to be in the presence of so great an accomplishment. Then the two apprentices thanked the Master for dignifying them with his attention and respectfully took their leave. The maker of miniatures, knowing that they had seen nothing, that their words were hollow, and that they would never visit him again, returned with some impatience to his work; and as he sank below the crust of the visible world, into his dazzling kingdom, he understood that he had travelled a long way from the early days, that he still had far to go, and that, from now on, his life would be difficult and without forgiveness. ◆

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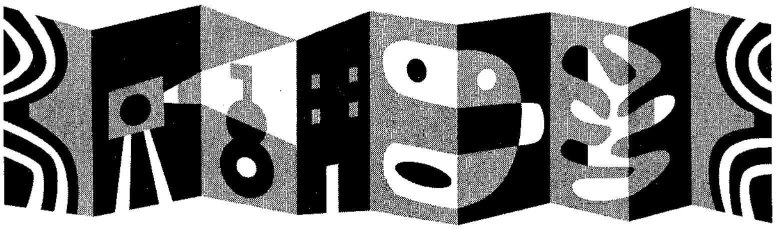


MUSICAL EVENTS

ALL OVER THE MAP

The Kronos Quartet returns to Carnegie Hall.

BY ALEX ROSS

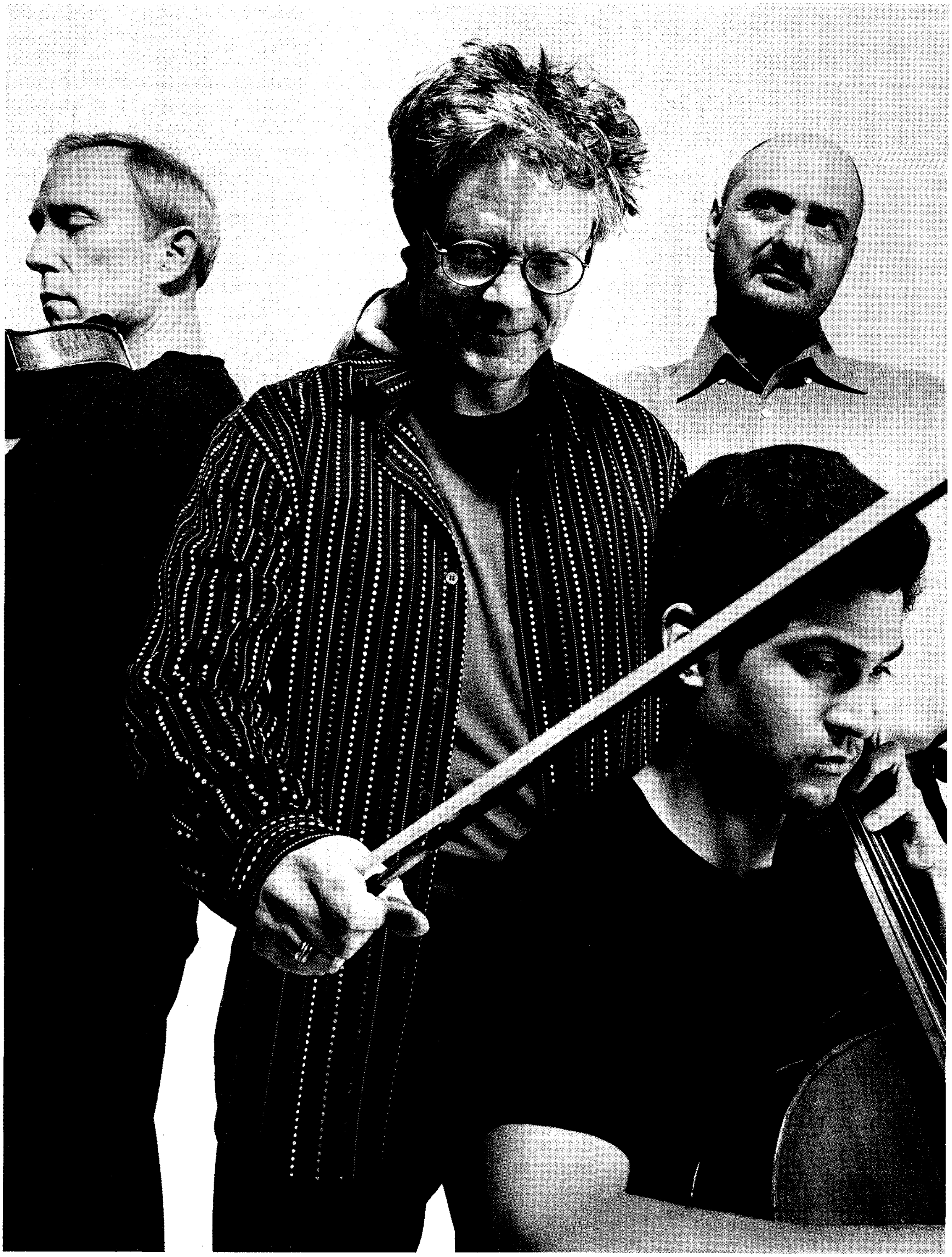
The Kronos Quartet, which is in the middle of a six-concert series at Carnegie Hall, has enacted two revolutions in its more than three-decade life, one of style and one of substance. Back in the nineteen-eighties, the members of Kronos—the violinists David Harrington and John Sherba, the violist Hank Dutt, and the cellist Joan Jeanrenaud, whose place is now occupied by Jeffrey Zeigler—startled audiences by coming onstage in modish fashions, in a look that suggested a genteel art-rock band. They also lowered the lights, projected images behind them, and generally attempted to bring a little atmosphere to whichever hall they had booked for the night. Self-appointed guardians of the classical grail (I was one at the time) dismissed them as purveyors of kitsch. But Kronos wasn't putting on a show; they were choosing to be their funky San Francisco selves, rather than checking their personalities at the door. Now others have come around to their way of thinking. Vibrant younger quartets like the St. Lawrence, the Pacifica, the Flux, and Ethel make music in whatever style they see fit, dispelling the aura of aristocratic make-believe that surrounds classical music. The new-music ensemble Alarm Will Sound has developed a casually dynamic style that is like Kronos gone orchestral.

Second, Kronos proved that the string quartet, long the most self-consciously "classical" of classical ensembles, could become a kind of all-terrain vehicle in contemporary culture. Early on, they made a near-total commitment to living composers, and also explored jazz, rock, and folk music. Various quartets have specialized in new music—the Arditti Quartet, too, has played hundreds of premières—but Kronos is notable for its global vision. Refusing to limit themselves to classical genres and established new-music circles, they have worked with composers and musicians from dozens of countries, from Argentina to Zimbabwe. As a result, they helped to bring into being the thriving marketplace for what is known as "world music." The phrase is subject to constant intellectual debate, but in Kronos's case it signifies a simple recognition that classical music is no longer an exclusively European-American enterprise, and that the role of the composer is undergoing an unpredictable evolution. At one of their Carnegie concerts, Kronos brought in the Inuit throat-singer Tanya Tagaq, who has collaborated with them to create a work called "Nunavut," in which each member of the quartet improvises on Tagaq's low moans and piercing cries. There was no "composer" as such, but the experience was raucously unlike anything I'd ever heard.

Anyone who likes Kronos has probably been exasperated with them at one time or another. Their recordings for the Nonesuch label are as inconsistent as Bob Dylan's post-1966 catalogue, though equally worth sifting through. When they venture too far afield, as in their politely grungy cover of Hendrix's "Purple Haze," they look foolish; and some of their globalist ventures, such as the 1992 compilation "Pieces of Africa," are pale echoes of the real thing, world music with training wheels. Still, they are never insincere in their enthusiasms, and when there is a meeting of minds—as happened when Steve Reich created for them his multimedia masterpiece "Different Trains," or when Morton Feldman gave them a six-hour-long quartet—masterpieces join the canon. The best thing about Kronos is their unflagging curiosity about the world. Their failures are as riveting as others' successes, and their successes have widened the world of sound.

Kronos's first three programs at Carnegie's Zankel Hall offered the usual thrills and spills. The first concert was a long, grim, but absorbing affair, addressing themes such as the Holocaust, September 11th, and eternal Slavic despair. Alexandra Du Bois's "Night Songs," a piece inspired by the concentration-camp testimony of the Dutch writer Etty Hillesum, is driven by strong feeling and by darkly pulsing, Janáček-like melodies, but it fails to find a clear form for its ideas. Michael Gordon's "The Sad Park" is based on recordings of the testimony of children who witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Center: eerily slowed-down, unearthly voices are blended into a soundscape of buzzing, sliding, harshly chanting strings. The 9/11 memorial has fast become a compositional cliché, but this one, raw and ritualistic, felt necessary. After intermission came Henryk Górecki's Third Quartet, which the composer finished in 1995 but did not release until last year, perhaps because he was unnerved by the freak success of his Third Symphony. Fifty minutes long, it is slow, static, forlornly meditative, frustratingly narrow in compass, and, for several long stretches, totally mesmerizing. Kronos played with awesome intensity throughout.

Exasperation arrived the next night, in the form of a program titled "Alternative Radio: Music in a Time of War." The left-wing historian Howard Zinn was interviewed by the equally left-wing Colorado radio host David Barsamian, and Kronos played interludes. Although I consider myself left of center, after an hour of Popular Front nostalgia, dark talk about the powers that be, and fulsome praise for the anti-Zionist play "My Name Is Rachel Corrie," I couldn't help wishing that Condoleezza Rice had been booked for the second half, to read policy papers



Clockwise from left: Hank Dutt, David Harrington, John Sherba, and Jeffrey Zeigler. Photograph by Cass Bird.

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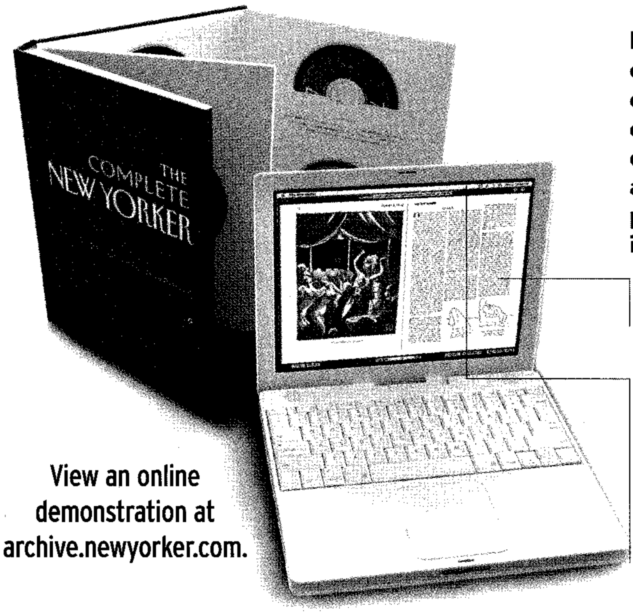

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on Iraq and play Brahms at the piano. My favorite moment came after Zinn said that free speech was being curtailed in America: a man in the balcony yelled "Amen!" and a woman near him yelled "Quiet!" The music came from the innocuous, folkish-wistful corner of the Kronos repertory. Tanya Tagaq's performance, at the end, was joyously irrelevant to the preceding mutual-admiration society.

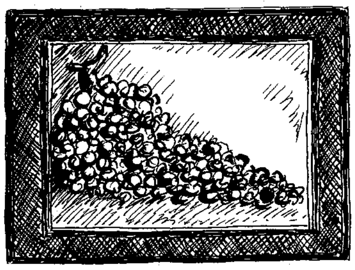
The weekend concluded with a superb program devoted to Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, a composer from Azerbaijan, and Rahman Asadollahi, an Iranian musician of Azeri descent. Ali-Zadeh is a quietly substantial voice in modern music, and Kronos has been promoting her for more than a decade. (Another major advocate is Joel Sachs, of Juilliard, who programmed her piano quintet "Khazar" at the Focus! Festival, at Juilliard, in February.) In rigorous and balanced forms, Ali-Zadeh fuses traditional Azerbaijani music—in particular, the intricate improvisations of *mugam*—with twentieth-century techniques, such as the avant-garde colorings of George Crumb and the instrumental deconstructions of John Cage. She alternates between reflective-static and muscular, driving moods, manipulating the tonal nuances of *mugam's* scales and melodic types. Kronos performed "Mugam Sayagi" and "Apsheron Quintet." The composer joined them on piano in the latter piece, and also played "Music for Piano," for which, inspired by Cage's prepared-piano pieces, she draped a necklace over the middle strings of the piano, making it sound lutelike. This music can be heard on Kronos's recent disk "Mugam Sayagi," which is a gorgeous object and one of the best things the quartet has done.

After intermission, Asadollahi, who is in exile from the regime in Iran, came on with his *garmon*, a type of accordion, to present "Mugam Beyati Shiraz" and "Garmon Yanar Odlaryurduna." His solo in the last piece was a thing of gasping beauty, and the rave-up that followed had a properly explosive impact on the audience. Kronos, playing transcriptions by Lev Zhurbin, achieved the feat of disappearing into Asadollahi's world. In so doing, they said all that needed to be said about the constructive power of a pluralist, rather than a fundamentalist, view of the world. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Night Watch, by Sarah Waters (Riverhead; $25.95). In the fall of 1947, an androgynous woman walks aimlessly through the scarred streets of London, adjusting her cufflinks. An ambulance driver during the Blitz, she now does nothing more dramatic than go to the cinema, arriving midway through a film and watching the second half first—"People's pasts, you know, being so much more interesting than their futures." Likewise, this historical novel begins at the end and moves backward, tracing the lives of its characters from peacetime Britain to the early years of the war. The centerpiece of the book is set in 1944, when the characters come fully alive, creeping through blackout London—an apocalyptic landscape of rubble and ash, searchlights and fires. Waters, acclaimed for her Victorian-era romps, has done meticulous research, and renders wartime scenes with unnerving authenticity.

Duchess of Nothing, by Heather McGowan (Bloomsbury; $23.95). An unnamed woman of indeterminate age is abandoned by her lover in Rome, and left to care for his seven-year-old brother. This premise, suggestive of some modern-day Henry James novel, is full of potential, but McGowan's minimalist execution is disappointing. She presents the reader with only the faintest gradations of plot, setting, and character development, the better to focus attention on the narrator's voice. These musings, aiming for offbeat charm, seem mannered ("It was intolerable of my parents not to have organized a sibling") and mundane ("My feet please me enormously today"). And the blankness of the narrator (she used to work in a bank, had a cat, and "read fat novels while I drank hot liquids") reduces the interest of her emerging relationship with her young charge, which is by turns narcissistic, sadistic, and loving.



Earthly Powers, by Michael Burleigh (HarperCollins; $29.95). Burleigh, a historian of the Third Reich, says that he originally intended to write an account of "political religions," such as Bolshevism. But he came to feel that a study of the intertwining of politics and religion—specifically, Christianity—in Europe, from the French Revolution through the First World War, was a necessary preface. He argues that the influence of the Enlightenment has been overrated, and that religion has thoroughly informed even such avowedly secular movements as the Jacobins' "civic cults" and "eschatological" Marxism. Burleigh intends his book as a corrective to what he sees as our risky forgetfulness about "the ways in which Christianity permeates our culture" and has shaped European civic values. As an intellectual history, the book is digressive but compelling, with sudden detours for the novelist Mary Ward's financial problems or Dostoyevsky's gambling, but its definition of Christian influence is often uselessly broad—must every appeal to transcendence, brotherhood, or national martyrdom hark back to the Bible?

Absolute Convictions, by Eyal Press (Henry Holt; $25). Press, the son of an abortion doctor in Buffalo, New York, provides a lucid social history of the city's abortion wars in an effort to explain the murder of one of his father's colleagues, Barnett Slepian, who was killed in 1998 by an anti-abortion activist named James Charles Kopp. The story begins three years before Roe v. Wade, when the New York State legislature decriminalized abortion, making the state a haven; in 1971, more than two hundred thousand women sought safe abortions in its hospitals. Press traces the rise of the evangelical anti-abortion movement in the Rust Belt and, in fresh interviews, gives fair hearing to the activists who spent much of the eighties blockading his father's medical office. He also examines dispassionately the psychology that drove Kopp to commit murder in the name of unborn life.

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BOOKS

HERE'S WHY

A sociologist offers an anatomy of explanations.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Little Timothy is playing with his older brother Geoffrey, when he comes running to his mother.

"Mommy, Mommy," he starts in. "I was playing with my truck, and then Geoffrey came and he said it was his turn to play with the truck even though it's my truck and then he pushed me."

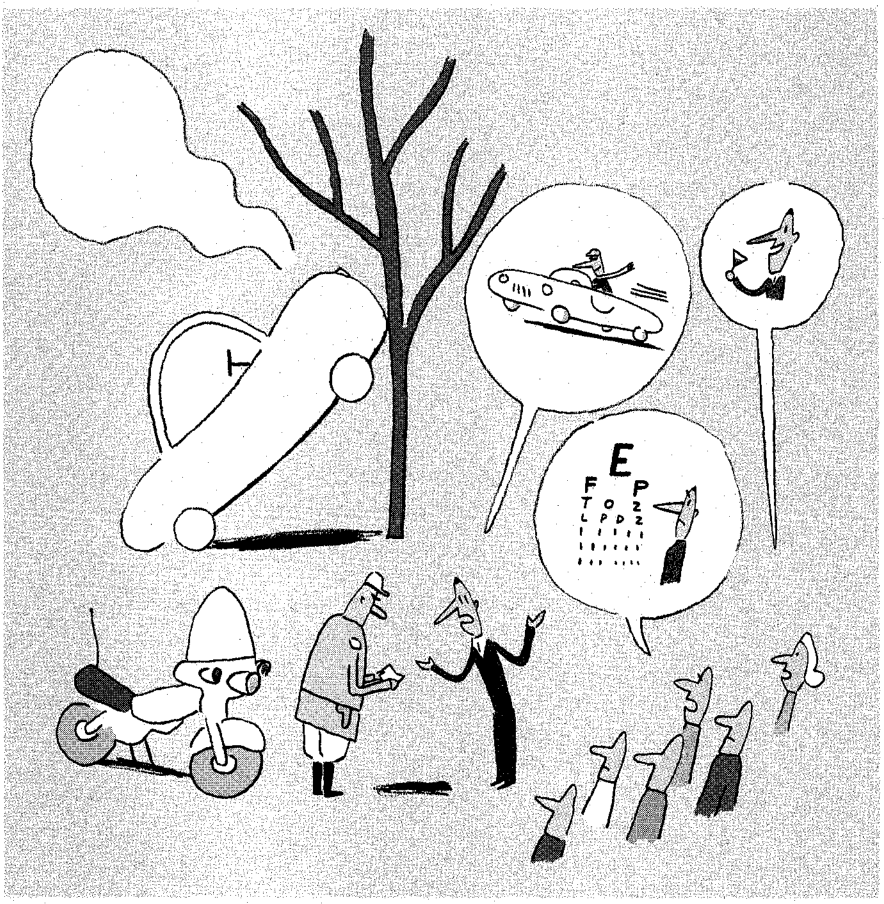
"Timothy!" his mother says, silencing him. "Don't be a tattletale."

Timothy has heard that phrase—"Don't be a tattletale"—countless times, and it always stops him short. He has offered his mother an eyewitness account of a crime. His mother, furthermore, in no way disputes the truth of his story. Yet what does she do? She rejects it in favor of a simplistic social formula: Don't be a tattletale. It makes no sense. Timothy's mother would never use such a formula to trump a story if she were talking to his father. On the contrary, his mother and father tattle to each other about Geoffrey all the time. And, if Timothy were to tattle on Geoffrey to his best friend, Bruce, Bruce wouldn't reject the story in favor of a formula, either. Narratives are the basis of Timothy's friendship with Bruce. They explain not just effects but causes. They *matter*—except in this instance, of a story told by Timothy to Mommy about Geoffrey, in which Mommy is suddenly indifferent to stories altogether. What is this don't-be-a-tattletale business about?

In "Why?" (Princeton; $24.95), the Columbia University scholar Charles Tilly sets out to make sense of our reasons for giving reasons. In the tradition of the legendary sociologist Erving Goffman, Tilly seeks to decode the structure of everyday social interaction, and the result is a book that forces readers to reëxamine everything from the way they talk to their children to the way they argue about politics.

In Tilly's view, we rely on four general categories of reasons. The first is what he calls conventions—conventionally accepted explanations. Tilly would call "Don't be a tattletale" a convention. The second is stories, and what distinguishes a story ("I was playing with my truck, and then Geoffrey came in . . .") is a very specific account of cause and effect. Tilly cites the sociologist Francesca Polletta's interviews with people who were active in the civil-rights sit-ins of the nineteen-sixties. Polletta repeatedly heard stories that stressed the spontaneity of the protests, leaving out the role of civil-rights organizations, teachers, and churches. That's what stories do. As Tilly writes, they circumscribe time and space, limit the number of actors and actions, situate all causes "in the consciousness of the actors," and elevate the personal over the institutional.

Then there are codes, which are high-level conventions, formulas that invoke sometimes recondite procedural rules and categories. If a loan officer turns you down for a mortgage, the reason he gives has to do with your inability to conform to a prescribed standard of creditworthiness. Finally, there are technical accounts: stories informed by specialized knowledge and authority. An academic history of civil-rights sit-ins wouldn't leave out the role of institutions, and it probably wouldn't focus on a few actors and actions; it would aim at giving patient and expert attention to every sort of nuance and detail.



Charles Tilly identifies four kinds of reasons people give, each "relational" in nature.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

Tilly argues that we make two common errors when it comes to understanding reasons. The first is to assume that some kinds of reasons are always better than others—that there is a hierarchy of reasons, with conventions (the least sophisticated) at the bottom and technical accounts at the top. That's wrong, Tilly says: each type of reason has its own role.

Tilly's second point flows from the first, and it's that the reasons people give aren't a function of their character—that is, there aren't people who always favor technical accounts and people who always favor stories. Rather, reasons arise out of situations and roles. Imagine, he says, the following possible responses to one person's knocking some books off the desk of another:

1. Sorry, buddy. I'm just plain awkward.
2. I'm sorry. I didn't see your book.
3. Nuts! I did it again.
4. Why did you put that book there?
5. I told you to stack up your books neatly.

The lesson is not that the kind of person who uses reason No. 1 or No. 2 is polite and the kind of person who uses reason No. 4 or No. 5 is a jerk. The point is that any of us might use any of those five reasons depending on our relation to the person whose books we knocked over. Reason-giving, Tilly says, reflects, establishes, repairs, and negotiates relationships. The husband who uses a story to explain his unhappiness to his wife—"Ever since I got my new job, I feel like I've just been so busy that I haven't had time for us"—is attempting to salvage the relationship. But when he wants out of the marriage, he'll say, "It's not you—it's me." He switches to a convention. As his wife realizes, it's not the content of what he has said that matters. It's his shift from the kind of reason-giving that signals commitment to the kind that signals disengagement. Marriages thrive on stories. They die on conventions.

Consider the orgy of reason-giving that followed Vice-President Dick Cheney's quail-hunting accident involving his friend Harry Whittington. Allies of the Vice-President insisted that the media were making way too much of it. "Accidents happen," they said, relying on a convention. Cheney, in a subsequent interview, looked penitently into the camera and said, "The image of him falling is something I'll never be able to get out of my mind. I fired, and there's Harry falling. And it was, I'd have to say, one of the worst days of my life." Cheney told a story. Some of Cheney's critics, meanwhile, focussed on whether he conformed to legal and ethical standards. Did he have a valid license? Was he too slow to notify the White House? They were interested in codes. Then came the response of hunting experts. They retold the narrative of Cheney's accident, using their specialized knowledge of hunting procedure. The Cheney party had three guns, and on a quail shoot, some of them said, you should never have more than two. Why did Whittington retrieve the downed bird? A dog should have done that. Had Cheney's shotgun been aimed more than thirty degrees from the ground, as it should have been? And what were they doing in the bush at five-thirty in the afternoon, when the light isn't nearly good enough for safe hunting? The experts gave a technical account.

Here are four kinds of reasons, all relational in nature. If you like Cheney and are eager to relieve him of responsibility, you want the disengagement offered by a convention. For a beleaguered P.R. agent, the first line of defense in any burgeoning scandal is, inevitably, *There is no story here.* When, in Cheney's case, this failed, the Vice-President had to convey his concern and regret while not admitting that he had done anything procedurally wrong. Only a story can accomplish that. Anything else—to shrug and say that accidents happen, for instance—would have been perceived as unpardonably callous. Cheney's critics, for their part, wanted the finality and precision of a code: he acted improperly. And hunting experts wanted to display their authority and educate the public about how to hunt safely, so they retold the story of Cheney's accident with the benefit of their specialized knowledge.

Effective reason-giving, then, involves matching the kind of reason we give to the particular role that we happen to be playing at the time a reason is necessary. The fact that Timothy's mother accepts tattling from his father but rejects it from Timothy is not evidence of capriciousness; it just means that a husband's relationship to his wife gives him access to a reason-giving category that a son's role does not. The lesson "Don't be a tattletale"—which may well be one of the hardest childhood lessons to learn—is that in the adult world it is sometimes more important to be appropriate than it is to be truthful.

Two years ago, a young man named Anthony mugged a woman named Anne on a London street. Anthony was caught and convicted, and a few days before he was sentenced he sat down with Anne for a face-to-face meeting, as an exercise in what is known as "restorative justice." The meeting was videotaped by a criminal-justice research group, and to watch the video is to get an even deeper sense of the usefulness of Tilly's thinking.

"We're going to talk about what's happened," the policeman moderating the meeting begins. "Who's been affected, and how they've been affected, and see what we can do to make things better."

Anthony starts. He has a shaved head, a tattoo on his neck, and multiple piercings in his eyebrows and ears. Beside him is his partner, Christy, holding their baby boy. "What happened is I had a bad week. Been out of work for a couple of weeks. Had my kneecap broken. . . . I only had my dad in this country, who I don't get on with. We had no gas in our flat. Me and Christy were arguing all that morning. The baby had been screaming. We were hungry." His story comes out painfully and haltingly. "It was a bit too much. All my friends I was asking to loan me a couple of pounds. They just couldn't afford to give it to me. . . . I don't know what got into me. I just reached over and took your bag. And I'm really sorry for it. And if there is anything I can do to make up for it, I'm willing to do it. I know you probably don't want me anywhere near you."

Anne has been listening closely, her husband, Terry, next to her. Now she tells her side of the story. She heard a sound like male laughter. She turned, and felt her purse being pulled away. She saw a man pulling up his hood. She ran after him, feeling like a "complete idiot." In the struggle over her bag, her arm was injured. She is a journalist and has since had difficulty typing. "The mugging was very small," she says. "But the effect is not going away as fast as I expected. . . . It makes life one notch less bearable."

It was Christy's turn. She got the call at home. She didn't know exactly what had happened. She took the baby and walked to the police station, angry and frightened. "We got ourselves in a situation where we were relying on the state, and we just can't live off the money," Christy says. "And that's not your problem." She starts to cry. "He's not a drug addict," she continues, looking at her husband. Anthony takes the baby from her and holds him. "If we go to court on Monday, and he does get three years for what he's done, or six years, that's his problem. He done it. And he's got to pay for what he's done. I wake up and hear him cry"—she looks at the baby—"and it kills me. I'm in a situation where I can't do anything to make this better. . . . I just want you to know. The first thing he said to me when he walked in was 'I apologized.' And I said, 'That makes what difference?' "

Watching the conference is a strange experience, because it is utterly foreign to the criminal process of which it is ostensibly a part. There is none of the oppressive legalese of the courtroom. Nothing is "alleged"; there are no "perpetrators." The formal back-and-forth between questioner and answerer, the emotionally protective structure of courtroom procedure, is absent. Anne and Terry sit on comfortable chairs facing Christy and Anthony. They have a conversation, not a confrontation. They are telling stories, in Tilly's sense of that word: repairing their relationship by crafting a cause-and-effect account of what happened on the street.

Why is such storytelling, in the wake of a crime, so important? Because, Tilly would argue, some social situations don't lend themselves to the easy reconciliation of reason and role. In Jonathan Franzen's novel "The Corrections," for example, one of the characters, Gary, is in the midst of a frosty conversation with his wife, Caroline. Gary had the sense, Franzen writes, "that Caroline was on the verge of accusing him of being 'depressed,' and he was afraid that if the idea that he was depressed gained currency, he would forfeit his right to his opinions. . . . Every word he spoke would become a symptom of disease; he would never again win an argument." Gary was afraid, in other words, that a technical account of his behavior—the explanation that he was clinically depressed—would trump his efforts to use the stories and conventions that permitted him to be human. But what was his wife to do? She wanted him to change.

When we say that two parties in a conflict are "talking past each other," this is what we mean: that both sides have a legitimate attachment to mutually exclusive reasons. Proponents of abortion often rely on a convention (choice) and a technical account (concerning the viability of a fetus in the first trimester). Opponents of abortion turn the fate of each individual fetus into a story: a life created and then abruptly terminated. Is it any surprise that the issue has proved to be so intractable? If you believe that stories are the most appropriate form of reason-giving, then those who use conventions and technical accounts will seem morally indifferent—regardless of whether you agree with them. And, if you believe that a problem is best adjudicated through conventions or technical accounts, it is hard not to look upon storytellers as sensationalistic and intellectually unserious. By Tilly's logic, abortion proponents who want to engage their critics will have to become better storytellers—and that, according to the relational principles of such reason-giving, may require them to acknowledge an emotional connection between a mother and a fetus. (Ironically, many of the same members of the religious right who have so emphatically demonstrated the emotional superiority of stories when it comes to abortion insist, when it comes to Genesis, on a reading of the Bible as a technical account. Thus do creationists, in the service of reason-giving exigency, force the Holy Scripture to do double duty as a high-school biology textbook.)

Tilly argues that these conflicts are endemic to the legal system. Laws are established in opposition to stories. In a criminal trial, we take a complicated narrative of cause and effect and match it to a simple, impersonal code: first-degree murder, or second-degree murder, or manslaughter. The impersonality of codes is what makes the law fair. But it is also what can make the legal system so painful for victims, who find no room for their voices and their anger and their experiences. Codes punish, but they cannot heal.

So what do you do? You put Anne and her husband in a room with Anthony and Christy and their baby boy and you let them talk. In a series of such experiments, conducted in Britain and Australia by the criminologists Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang, restorative-justice programs have shown encouraging results in reducing recidivism rates among offenders and psychological trauma among victims. If you view the tape of the Anthony-Anne exchange, it's not hard to see why. Sherman said that when the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales watched it at home one night he wept.

"If there is anything I can do, please say it," Anthony says.

"I think most of what you can do is between the two of you, actually," Anne says to Anthony and Christy. "I think if you can put your lives back together again, then that's what needs to be done."

The moderator tells them all to take a break and help themselves to "Metropolitan Police tea and coffee and chocolate biscuits."

Anne asks Christy how old the baby is, and where they are living. It turns out that their apartment has been condemned. Terry stands up and offers the baby a chocolate biscuit, and the adults experience the kind of moment that adults have in the company of babies, where nothing matters except the child in front of them.

"He's a good baby," Christy says. A convention. One kind of reason is never really enough. ♦

BURIED HATCHET DEPARTMENT

From the Detroit News.

Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick has named former mayoral challenger and City Councilwoman Sharon McPhail, who once accused him of rigging her massage chair to electrocute her, to the newly created position of general counsel for the mayor's office.

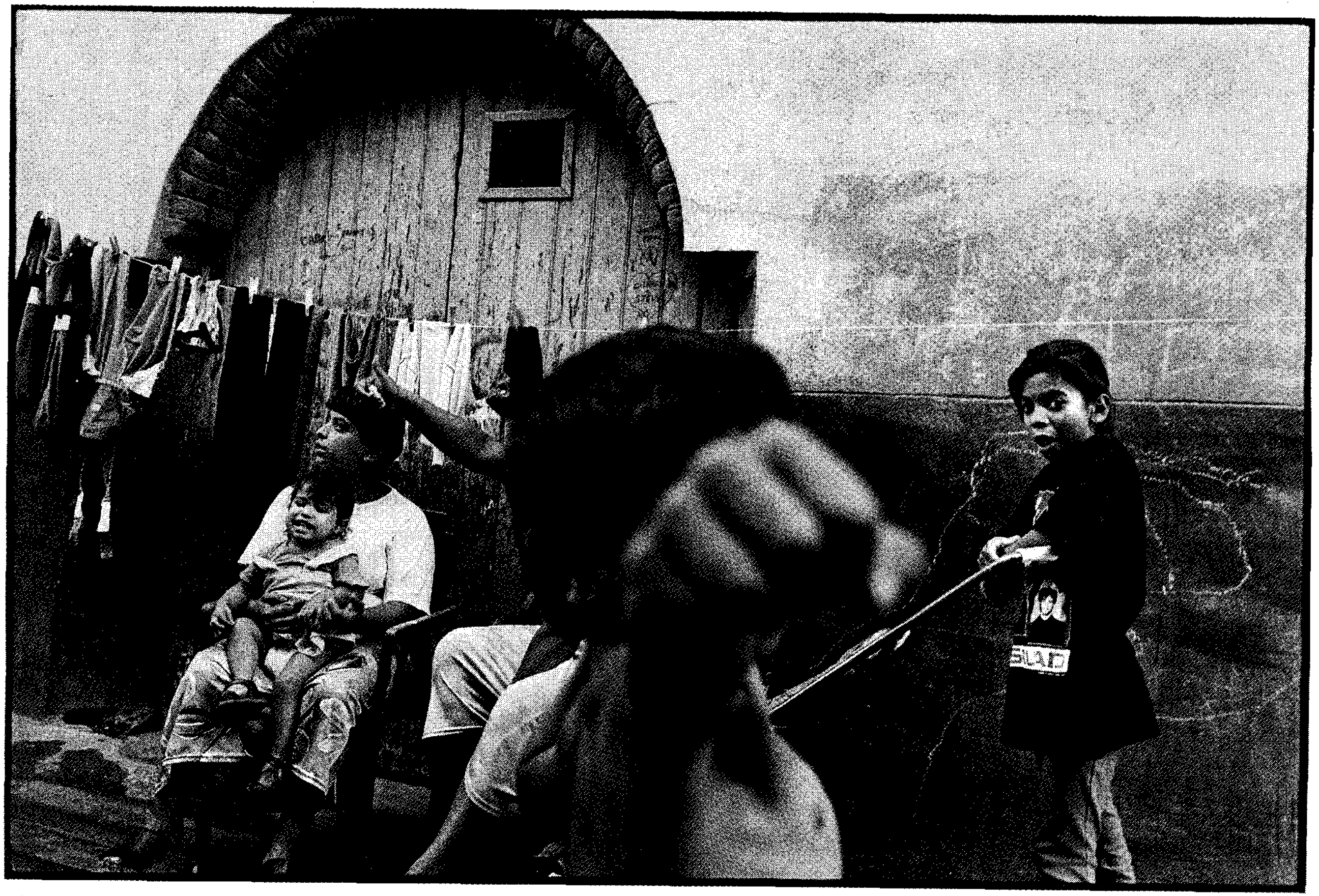
BOOKS

DRAWN TO GYPSIES

Six years in the South of France.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Fernanda Eberstadt, an ambitious, resourceful novelist with a lush style and a Manhattan background, has written, in "Little Money Street: In Search of Gypsies and Their Music in the South of France" (Knopf; $24.95), a piquant nonfictional account of her successful attempt to penetrate the Gypsy enclave of Perpignan. This city, at the eastern end of the Pyrenees, holds five thousand Gypsies in an urban center of around a hundred thousand. Eberstadt and her husband, Alistair Bruton, and their two small children found themselves living in a rented house outside Perpignan because Bruton, we are told a bit abruptly, "was writing a book about the decline of religion in modern Europe, and was looking for somewhere half to hole up in, half to base it on." Why this obscure, unprosperous, and atypical region of France—the province of Roussillon, ceded by Spain as late as 1659 and still regarded by many of its natives as "northern Catalonia"—should serve his investigative purpose is left mysterious, but its usefulness to his wife is made clear. In the course of a cosmopolitan life, she has always, she tells us, "been drawn to Gypsies": after a childhood glimpse of a trio begging at an outdoor café in Paris, she has "sought out Gypsies—Gypsies who run travelling circuses in Ireland, or sleep in the ruined Byzantine city walls in Istanbul, or camp on the beach in Palermo, or even live in a brownstone basement on the Upper West Side of Manhattan." Though her six years of living in Roussillon may have left her with "the same attraction to their intractable difference," readers of her account, if this reviewer is an example, will be cured of any faint desire they may ever have entertained to live like a Gypsy.



The author got to know the Perpignan Gypsies through their music. Photograph by Tiane Doan Na Champassak.

AGENCE VU

Evidently it's a miserable life, for the shiftless, jobless, largely illiterate men, and twice as bad for the homebound women, generally married in their teens to other teens, who will bully, betray, tyrannize, and most likely beat them. As for their children, they stay up so late watching television and hanging out on the street that they are usually too sleepy to go to school; Gypsies must be the only significant ethnic group in France that actively discourages literacy and encourages truancy. Compared with them, the embattled immigrants from the Muslim world are models of aspiration to bourgeois order and enlightenment. One of Eberstadt's more *hallucinante* chapters describes a conference on education held at Collège Jean Moulin, a junior high school for preponderantly Gypsy students. "The occasion is pretty merry,” she writes. “People who work with Gypsies tend to laugh a lot. It’s a laughter of hysterical exasperation, because if you didn’t laugh, you’d hang yourself or quit.” The school’s principal, a “barrel-chested, crewcutted Catalan” named Paul Landric, is quoted:

> “If an Arab kid cuts school, he stays in the street so his parents don’t find out. If a Gypsy plays hookey, it’s *in order* to stay home. Here, it’s the parents who are the disruptive influence, mothers who want to coddle their sons, fathers who don’t want their daughters to be seen hanging with boys at school. The girl is a commodity, and they don’t want her to lose her market value.”

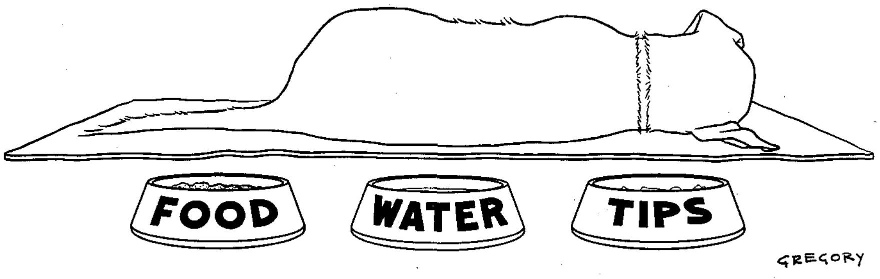
Her value, as a virgin, is ascertained not by the young groom on the wedding night but, according to archaic folk custom, by the probing finger of a tribal crone: Eberstadt’s partially renegade Gypsy friend Linda explains, “For Gypsies, it’s a nasty old woman who is paid to penetrate the girl, like a gynecologist but with dirty hands, in front of all the husband’s family. It’s terrifying, it’s inhuman.” Landric sums up: “People talk about preserving Gypsy culture. But what am I as an educator supposed to do when the comportment of my students is frankly pathological?” Eberstadt, liberal enough to doubt liberal pieties, complains that “if these pedagogues were nineteenth-century missionaries to a cannibal island, they could not be more convinced that the belief system they wished to impose upon the Gypsy savages—in this case, egalitarian secularism—was as unequivocal a good as clean water.” Yet she comes down, finally, on the side of clean water, asserting that the French authorities are “using their utmost powers of imagination and sympathy to devise ways of freeing a community that was clearly stuck and unhappy.”

Gypsies were not always so stuck; their nomadism, now legally discouraged by most European governments, excused their educational recalcitrance, and they maintained “a seventeenth-century agrarian culture designed for seasonal pickers, small artisans, blacksmiths, market sellers.” They used to be “horse breeders, blacksmiths, basket-weavers,” trades that became obsolete in the sixties. The author, however, is not offering to solve “Gypsy problems,” or to give a history of this curious people, which, linguistic evidence indicates, originated in India and has endured centuries of disapproval and persecution throughout Europe, including decimation in the Holocaust.

Eberstadt engages with Gypsies as a small set of local friends, and came to them via a CD put out by Sony in 1999, “Ida y Vuelta,” featuring a mostly Gypsy band called Tekameli. The CD, she tells us, is “supremely cultic . . . veiled, hermetic . . . arcane”: “The musicians are Frenchmen singing Pentacostalist hymns in a language—Gypsy Catalan—that very few people know exists. It brings news from a place no one’s heard of, and the news is at once too close and too distant to be intelligible.” Any of us, to be sure, would be fascinated by music so hard to describe or pigeonhole, but perhaps only a New York writer, marooned with her family in a “fairly desolate,” “half-savage,” and “malnourished” backwater of Europe, would have undertaken a vigorous pursuit of the members of the elusive band:

> For months, I listened hypnotically to *Ida y Vuelta*, while pursuing Tekameli leads and Gypsy research on the side. I left phone messages on dead voice mails. I spoke to musicians’ daughters, nephews, cousins-in-law, who told me to call back later, by which time the telephone had been cut off. In a perfect emblem of futility, I sent letters composed in painstaking schoolgirl French to men I later discovered were illiterate. . . . I moped, I fretted, I sulked.

She was advised by a Catalan disk jockey to attend an Assemblée—a church of the Protestant Pentecostalism that since the nineteen-sixties has exerted a dominating influence on France’s Gypsy population. She found the church packed with gender-segregated Gypsies, singing and testifying in Gitan, the gruff dialect spoken in St. Jacques, a former Jewish ghetto in Perpignan settled by Gypsies when the Vichy government cleared out the Jews. In the Assemblée, a young man, entering late, took the chair beside her, and, seeing her, “started back in an involuntary fright, the appalled recoil of a toddler who’s just realized that the adult whose knees he’s reaching for isn’t his mother.” She declares, “It was then that I understood something of the reality behind Gypsy defiance, Gypsy insults, Gypsy jeers. St. Jacques Gypsies are in fact far more scared of non-Gypsies than even the timidest non-Gypsy is of them.”



A resolutely non-timid non-Gypsy, Eberstadt finds her way in, eventually, via the discontented wives and female consorts of the Tekameli musicians. Two, especially, allow themselves to be befriended and seen close up: Linda, “thirty years old, tall and beautiful, with a dimpled white smile, hair done in a headdress of African braids, good make-up, and charm like a Mickey Finn,” and her sister, “small, bedraggled” Diane, her “sheepish grin” marred by brown or missing teeth. It is runty, scatterbrained Diane, and not handsome, efficient Linda, who is the common-law wife of Moïse Espinas, the lead Tekameli singer and “possessor of the greatest voice north of Barcelona.” Moïse, who is twenty-eight when Eberstadt meets him and already growing plump, has “a complicated attitude toward music, as if his own gift lies in a state of untaught purity that might be defiled either by too much use or by exposure to other people’s music.” He and his colleagues would rather play cards than rehearse. Guy Bertrand, a musical Frenchman who gives himself credit for developing Roussillon Gypsy music into commercial viability, sees little future for it:

> “It’s not easy to work with Gypsies. . . . They have no structure in their lives, no discipline, no vision, and hence they can’t critique themselves, they can’t develop. Musically, they are as good at fourteen as they ever will be. . . . In all the years I’ve known him, Moïse has never done a single thing to deepen or improve or develop his music. All he’s done is strut around for journalists, blowing his *money, and making babies all over the* world.”

In Eberstadt’s reckoning, Gypsy values amount to a disabling intensification of "family values": a good wife, in her obligatory ankle-length black skirt, can't leave the house without a husband's permission, and men would rather laze around "at home, *tranquille*" than work. It is "a culture in which girls are best off braindead." Eberstadt indignantly concludes, "What differentiates '*la loi gitane*' "—Gypsy law—"from Judaism or Islam or more fundamentalist brands of Christianity is that there is no corresponding code of male probity, nor is there any sense of divine will behind the prohibitions. Gypsy laws, it seems, are made not to glorify God but merely to spite women!"

Nevertheless, the transplanted New Yorker has some good times with her new friends. She develops a kind of crush on Linda—"a gorgeous woman in full command of her own sexuality"—and in girlish mall outings and car rides with Diane experiences the "kind of wild abandoned fun I haven't known since I was seventeen." She even gets taken by Moïse to a cockfight—indeed, the Perpignan championship, twenty-five bouts held in a nameless settlement of Andalusian Gypsies—and is the only woman in the crowd. Her description of the bouts and their human promoters is as gaudy and appalling as the cockfight scene in Nathanael West's "Day of the Locust." This chapter and her succeeding one, describing the laughter-filled education conference, constitute the book's most vivid reportage and together cinch its apparent point that the Gypsies are a hopeless case, their recreations as vicious and vacuous as their traditional defense mechanisms are self-ruinous:

> They forget their French and keep their children out of school and marry them to their first cousins aged fourteen. They accept bribes to vote for Mayor Alduy. They lose their teeth and are too frightened to go to the dentist. They die of minor diseases against which other French people—people who go to school—are inoculated. And they don't leave a trace.

As writing, "Little Money Street" is lively and varied, moving proficiently between statistics and anecdote, warm sympathy and cold condemnation. As narrative, "Little Money Street" has a distracting double focus; trying to see the Gypsies, we keep seeing the hip, assertive, irresistible journalist. She is more than marginally visible, imparting confidences like "I think, This place is godforsaken, but its broken beauties are in my bloodstream." The reader is flattered to share the other worlds of sophisticated experience that she brings to bear upon her sorry Gypsy slum. A visit to a Perpignan community center begins with this riff:

> It is a concrete building painted in one of those schoolchildren's murals of happy faces and sunflowers that tend to embellish neighborhoods where drive-by shootings are a common occurrence and life expectancy for young males is a whole lot lower than the national average.

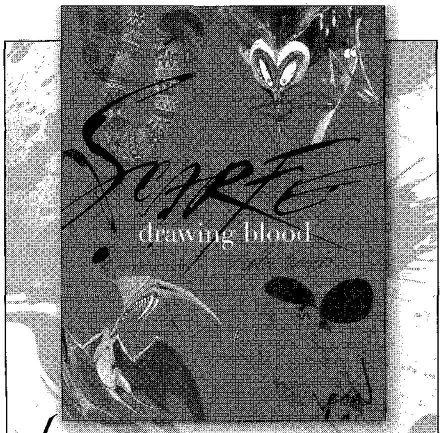
A gang of young Gypsy men slinking on the street, "cigarettes dripping from downy lips," wins a burst of global allusions: "They are often heartbreakingly beautiful, these boys, sometimes astonishingly debauched-looking, in a manner recalling Caravaggio ephebes, Pasolini's *ragazzi di vita*, and they dress in a bygone style of gangster dandyism." Allusiveness so generous has the effect of taking our mind down side roads, wondering what unastonishing debauched looks the witness has seen, and exactly when a bygone gangster style was chic, and whose heart is breaking.

Eberstadt's vocabulary sometimes shows an impatient petulance, as when the Gypsies' aged Mercedeses are reported to have "engines cannibalized from crappier cars," the earthy adjective returning in a heated lament over the consumerism "in which people are persuaded to express their love for their children through the acquisition of crappy goods they can't afford." Her assimilation of the Gypsy point of view becomes perhaps too thorough when she tells of a flagrant case of shoplifting—more than eight hundred dollars' worth of goods—thwarted by "a fellow-customer, an unidentified toady who should rot in hell." A female small-town mayor, an innocent bystander in the narrative, comes off as "a porky blonde." The author's relative youth seems vaunted in so florid a display of pop-musical lingo as:

> The blend of loony upbeat Afro-Caribbean bounce and hoarse flamenco-style yowls of brokenhearted prayer—an effect as schizophrenically original as R & B—created a music that seemed to express the perverse vagaries of a soul yearning for union with God.

Such verbal largesse foments a somewhat *en haut* tone; we are led to reflect that the author was possibly welcomed into the company of Gypsy women not only for her charm and sense of fun and flattering curiosity but because, in her past advantages and present freedoms and—a significant attraction—command of her own car, she loomed in their restricted, impecunious world as a phenomenon and even as a deliverer. Near the end of her long stay, a drug addict's husband makes begging motions: "The funny thing is, in six years of hanging around St. Jacques Gypsies, this is the first time anybody's ever hit me up for money. I figure I've got off lightly, so I head for the nearest cash machine."

We are not surprised when, late in "Little Money Street," its author confesses, "Writers—most writers—are opportunists: I had got my material, more than I could possibly use, and now . . . I needed not to see Diane in order to be able to 'see' her better." As the writer's children age, the culture gap widens; and months go by without her phoning her Gypsy friends. Yet—to end on a happy note—when, "after a long absence," she does "ring Diane's doorbell," she receives "a prodigal welcome." Old times are remembered, old friends revisited, new developments registered. Moïse has become a grandfather at thirty-one and has "been in mysteriously bad health." At the farewell party that Eberstadt and her family give before they move to a bigger house, a four-hour train ride away, in central France, Moïse sings, but still as "a great singer who hates to sing . . . for whom his 'gift' is something that at times he's seen as an easy way of making money or getting girls, but that more often is awkward, shaming, even anguishing." After a few songs, the chatter of the non-Gypsy guests, "as if we were in a restaurant and he were hustling for spare change," offends him and he stalks off. Later, he is coaxed to sing again, in a voice "waning from neglect." Soon he will be baptized and sing only canticles, reducing his family to living on welfare and handouts from relatives. Eberstadt's mildly melancholy coda to her dire portrait of contemporary European Gypsies leaves us with the mollifying impression that all parties end untidily, all lives are more or less muddles, and we all are, as the French officially term nomadic minorities, "*gens du voyage*." ♦



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THE THEATRE

HUNGRY HEARTS

"Pen" and "A Safe Harbor for Elizabeth Bishop."

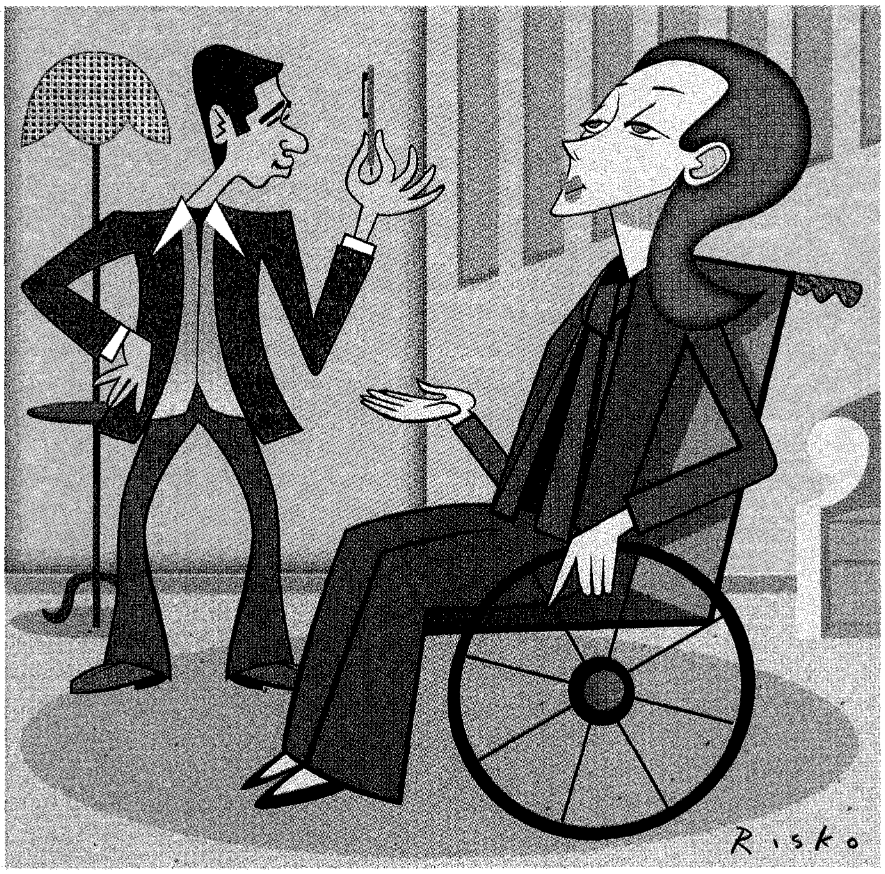
BY JOHN LAHR

Home is not always where the heart is; according to David Marshall Grant's rueful comedy "Pen" (directed by Will Frears, at Playwrights Horizons), sometimes family members can't find their hearts with two hands and a map. The drama here turns on the eponymous pen—a special one, as it happens—which the controlling, pessimistic, wheelchair-bound Helen Bayer (the excellent J. Smith-Cameron), a victim of multiple sclerosis, uses to write while lying down. Her dutiful, gawky son, Matt (Dan McCabe), who has a little problem with kleptomania, has stolen it to fill out his application to the University of Southern California, his dad's alma mater, acceptance to which would take him thousands of miles from this cozy patch of suburban Long Island and from his toxic, symbiotic arrangement with his divorced mother. "It's one thing to steal," Helen says to Matt about the pen. "But to implicate a maid. How low can you get?" The question the play raises is just who here is stealing from whom.

Helen wants her son at home with her. Constantly reminding him of her illness—"When you're crippled, you can have your own remote control"—she smothers him with demands, for food, for physical assistance, for him to fill out an application to the nearby state university at Stony Brook. Helen is funny, she is smart, and she has a sense of progressive liberal righteousness—all of which help her to deceive herself about her own murderous intentions. Envious of her son, she wants to rob him of his future. Matt's upbeat father, Jerry (well played by Reed Birney), a psychologist who is planning a move to the West Coast and is about to publish a self-help book on the subject of "why we can't truly own our own lives," keeps reminding Matt that he's not responsible for his mother. But, of course, Jerry is also trying to own Matt's life. At U.S.C., Matt would be near him and his new fiancée. With all these mixed messages coming at him, it's no wonder that Matt is confused and furious. After one fierce set-to with his mother, he throws a phone at her, then the pen. "Here, take your pen. I give up. Take it. Take my legs. Please. Walk! Go on, walk!" Matt's legs suddenly buckle under him and he crumples, paralyzed, to the ground. As the lights go down on the first act, Helen slowly rises from her wheelchair.

At this point, the play becomes a sort of allegory of psychological projection. The observations are astute; the execution, however, isn't satisfying. Grant hasn't sufficiently explained the rules of his game, and, inevitably, it becomes downright mystifying. Disguised in a wig and sunglasses, Helen seeks out Jerry at their old watering hole, where he tries to pick her up and, in a drunken confession, admits that leaving his crippled wife was "like leaving a wounded animal." "It's not her fault, then. There's hope," Helen says, encouraging him to return to his family for New Year's Eve. This and the subsequent psychological reversals beggar the imagination, even though they are served up with some good lines. "My father's a Jew, my mother's a Wasp," the tipsy Jerry tells Helen. "I feel nothing, but I feel guilty about it." As I left the show, confounded by the play's odd construction, I was reminded of one of its better aperçus: "Men don't have second thoughts. We just have the first one over and over again."

"I'm supposed to leave you," Matt tells his mother when he finally asserts his own desires and his mental health. But when it's the parents who do the leaving, it's a different story. "The shadow of the crib makes an enormous cage/upon the wall," the poet Elizabeth Bishop wrote in "Songs for a Colored Singer." And certainly Bishop, one of the twentieth century's most renowned poets, was imprisoned by the pall of her father's death, when she was only eight months old, and of her mother’s retreat into madness. (After the age of five, she never saw her mother again.) A sickly child, Bishop was raised by relatives. “I was always sort of a guest, and I think I’ve always felt like that,” she said. She once told Robert Lowell, “When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived.” This sense of abandonment accounts, in part, for her battle with alcohol, a connection she drew in “A Drunkard,” an unfinished poem in which she remembers her mother snapping at her, the morning after the Great Salem Fire:



Dan McCabe as a put-upon teen-ager fences with Mom (J. Smith-Cameron).

> But since that night, that day, that reprimand
> I have suffered from abnormal thirst—
> I swear it’s true—and by the age
> of twenty or twenty-one I had begun
> to drink, & drink—I can’t get enough.

Still, loss was also part of Bishop’s literary blessing. Her painterly way of seeing—the depth and precision of her portraits of the natural world—involved the kind of “heroic observations” she admired in Charles Darwin. For someone like Bishop, from whom so much had been taken, poetic exactness was a way of keeping the things she loved always with her: the sandpiper (“He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward, / in a state of controlled panic”), the moose (“Towering, antlerless, / high as a church, / homely as a house”), the beach (“hisses like fat”).

If there was a place on earth where Bishop felt at home, it was Brazil, where she lived with her aristocratic lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, from 1951 to 1967, in Rio and on an estate in Petrópolis, about an hour’s drive away. Marta Góes’s “A Safe Harbor for Elizabeth Bishop” (a Primary Stages production at 59E59, under the crisp direction of Richard Jay-Alexander), a one-woman show starring Amy Irving, tells the story of those years. The lights come up on a terra-cotta-colored map of Brazil as Irving’s voice intones a portion of Bishop’s “Arrival at Santos” (“Here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery”). The voice-over never reaches the last line of the poem—“we are driving to the interior”—and the play takes us, instead, to the outskirts. In her poetry, Bishop wanted, she said, to “dramatize the mind in action.” “Safe Harbor,” however, dramatizes Bishop in reaction—to Brazil, to Brazilian society, to the exotic flora and fauna around her, and, of course, to her turbulent lover, who killed herself in 1967. By definition, the one-person play tells rather than shows; in this sense, it deprives the audience of much of the pleasurable work of discovery. The narrator, unless he or she is unreliable, is simply bringing news. The promotion for “Safe Harbor” hypes Góes’s script (which was translated from the Portuguese by Mario Góes, Julia Beirao, and Irving) as “commanding”; “competent” would be more accurate. The literalness of the prose works against Bishop’s natural reticence and rigor.

Luckily, Irving, who is at once centered and vulnerable, manages to make Bishop’s intelligence and restraint believable. After Bishop died, in 1979, the poet James Merrill wrote about her “instinctive, modest, life-long impersonations of an ordinary woman.” Irving is also expert at this demure masquerade, and her characterization is subtle enough to suggest the contradiction in Bishop between good manners and a fierce heart. Irving, who has been married to the Brazilian film director Bruno Barreto, shares Bishop’s passion for the landscape. She parses the flat script with fresh response and acts the poems with deft simplicity. Whether Bishop is begging Lota to forgive her for drinking or thrilling at an *escola de samba* at Carnival, such is Irving’s intense focus that she can sometimes make us see the invisible people she’s addressing. Irving’s body has its own playful immanence, which brings to the show something of Bishop’s childlike delight in the sensual life. Bounding out of bed in a man’s shirt, she steps offstage on the balls of her feet, saying, “Lota, I want to get in the tub with you”; then, in one of the play’s most plangent moments, she returns, locked in an amber spotlight, to give a sweet, pitch-perfect reading of Bishop’s hymn to the home she found in Lota’s arms:

> Close, close all night
> the lovers keep.
> They turn together,
> in their sleep,
>
> close as two pages
> in a book
> that read each other
> in the dark.
>
> Each knows all
> the other knows,
> learned by heart
> from head to toes. ♦

ROBERT RISKO

DANCING

MOVING ON

Mark Morris's twenty-fifth.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

For its twenty-fifth-anniversary season, in March, the Mark Morris Dance Group staged a monthlong blowout. There were three full programs of dances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, plus three programs of smaller pieces—"Solos, Duets, and Trios"—at the company's headquarters, across the street. There were photo exhibitions and panels and interviews. BAM's Rose Cinemas showed Morris's favorite movies; its café featured musicians of his choice. There was even a karaoke night, which Morris led off with a rendition of Patsy Cline's "Three Cigarettes in an Ashtray."

It was all quite grand and—typically, for Morris—brash, since one of the developments it celebrated was the end of Morris's career as the leading dancer of his company. He is forty-nine and the director of a large troupe. It's time to go, and, to his credit, he's going, but almost nothing in this month of dances was more thrilling than the one short piece he did appear in, the 2001 "From Old Seville," where he and the superb Lauren Grant perform a *sevillana*, with castanets. The dance is a comedy—they're in a bar, there's a sexual triangle—but most of the comic effects derive simply from Morris's dancing. Has ever a rear end (and this one was in a business suit) had so many different moves? Has any other performer shown such rhythmic and dynamic range—early, late, hard, soft—and always told us something thereby? When will we see a dancer like this again?

Which brings us to the great question of the season: "Dido and Aeneas." Morris created this adaptation of Purcell's one-hour opera in 1989, and, as if to lay down a challenge to himself, he took both leads: Dido, the Queen of Carthage, all goodness; and the local Sorceress, all wickedness. That he, a man, assumed these two towering female roles was part of the sexual politics of the period. As he said at the time, he wanted to expand the expressiveness of male dancers; he wanted to give them what women had. He did so, and that was admirable, but, artistically, the more important fact was that the gender switch—plus the combining of the heroine and villainess roles—shot the show into a mythic territory, beyond realism and beyond conventional morals. Morris's "Dido" gives full play to the Queen's nobility and to the poignance of her vacillating lover, Aeneas. But what is so wonderful is that it pays equal tribute to the Sorceress, who engineers Dido's ruin. This witch and her obscene companions are sheer heaven; when they're onstage, we love them best. "Dido" takes the same attitude toward good and evil that God, we've been told, takes toward his creation. It looks down and says, "All this is part of my world." Such evenhandedness makes the debacle seem more horrible, because normal. At the same time, it bestows the so-called tragic calm.

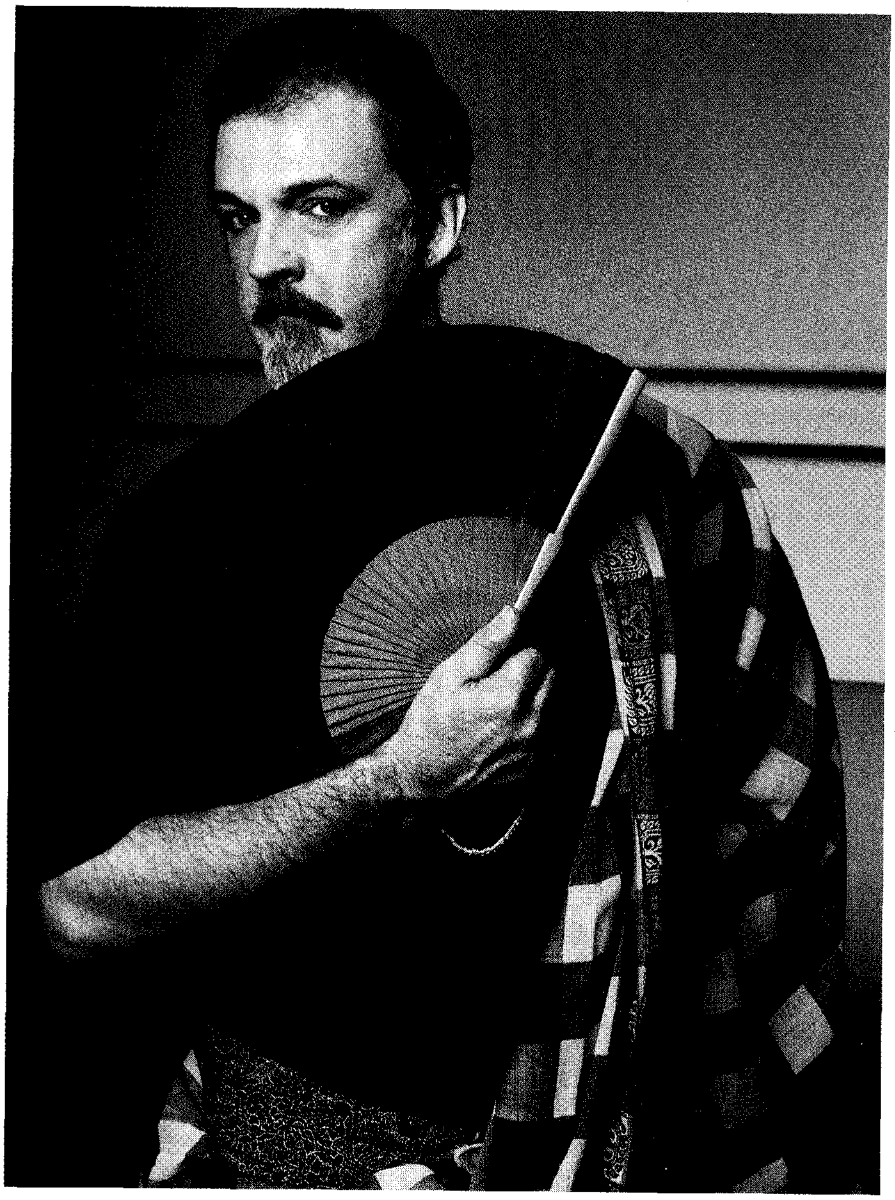
Morris stopped performing "Dido" in 2000. This year, he decided to revive the show. But there was a problem: though he could no longer dance it, he apparently did not feel that he had in his company, at that moment, a dancer who could handle the two roles. So he split them, making Dido a woman, Amber Darragh, and the Sorceress a man, Bradon McDonald. Darragh is the tallest woman in the troupe, and she has a kind of grand repose that fits her for Dido's carved-in-stone choreography. McDonald is a maenadic dancer with a firestorm of red hair; he was a natural for the Sorceress. But, however well chosen the two dancers, the fact that there were two made a drastic change in the production. "Great minds against themselves conspire," Purcell's chorus sings. In other words, courageous people may defeat themselves, out of an excess of courage—a truth that tragedians have been telling us for a long time but which Morris's doubling as Dido and the Sorceress made more patent, indeed, pushed in our faces. The dividing of the roles eliminates this conundrum.

Even more important is the fact that Dido is now a woman. Gone is the Asian-theatre mystery of the opera, the idea that the Queen could be a man, an icon, a principle. She is now a pretty girl from Oregon, and that changes the show radically, restores it to realism. It is impossible not to regret this, but in doing it Morris saved "Dido." The way to lose a dance—and thousands of dances have been lost thereby—is to stop performing it. The way to preserve it is to recast it and recoach it and put it back onstage. Morris has said that he hopes to combine Dido and the Sorceress again. Whether that happens or not, "Dido" will now live and, in time, will probably enter the international repertory and be performed by other companies. Sounds strange? So would it have sounded strange to Shakespeare's audience that anyone but Richard Burbage could be Hamlet, or that Gertrude and Ophelia could be played by women.

As Dido, Darragh started shy but gained force as she went along, and by the end, in her dance to the famous aria "When I Am Laid in Earth," she had the power to draw tears. As for McDonald, he was terrific from the beginning. Unlike other dancers who were asked, this season, to take on Morris's roles—in the "Solos" shows, some of his replacements looked pretty tense (so, actually, did McDonald in "Three Preludes")—he acted as though the part had been made on him. Morris is a performer who can't really be imitated. If you try, his volatile compound of sincerity and subversion breaks down into something camp or simply unreadable. Both Darragh and McDonald knew better, a wisdom I attribute not only to them but to Morris's directorial know-how. The same tact was shown by Craig Biesecker as Aeneas and Marjorie Folkman as Dido's sister, Belinda. There was no way to reproduce the perfection of the original cast: Guillermo Resto's affectingly clueless Aeneas, or Penny Hutchinson's Belinda, sweetly confident that if Dido would just lie down with the Trojan prince everything would work out fine. Biesecker and Folkman went ahead and made new characters, out of themselves.

Morris's dancers are famous for being "real," and the above-named are among the realest. Folkman and Biesecker seem incapable of falsity. The same is true of John Heginbotham, who plays St. Ignatius in Morris's 2000 version of the Virgil Thomson opera "Four Saints in Three Acts." Next to "Dido," with which it was programmed, "Four Saints" is a mild business. There's not much difference between the main characters, St. Teresa and St. Ignatius, and, in keeping with Gertrude Stein's text, there is no drama. The opera takes place in Heaven; nothing happens in Heaven. But every time Heginbotham ran across the stage, with his open, innocent face and his bare chest, you felt the gentle warmth of this show pass through you again.

The anniversary season, with works spanning more than two decades, gave us a chance to assess how Morris has changed. In his early years, his style was pleasingly shaggy. He made his dancers do steps that were too hard for them, and the resulting look of effort was central to the emotional impact of his shows. Today, his dancers are more "technical"; they can do the steps. It was odd, actually, in some of the earlier works on display this season—notably, the 1981 "Gloria," Morris's first big hit—to see the company perform, perfectly, maneuvers whose power once derived in part from their imperfect execution. But the dancers' increased skill is merely a byproduct. It's the old story: the boy grew up. Two pieces that are worth comparing—and I think they were put on the same program in order to invite the comparison—are "Gloria" and "V," created twenty years apart. Both are large ensemble works; both are "music visualizations," to sanctified old scores, "Gloria" to Vivaldi's "Gloria in D" and "V" to Schumann's Quintet in E-Flat. In both, Morris uses his habitual technique of introducing psychologically resonant gestures—a fall, an embrace—and then pushing those actions out of psychology, developing them musically, as if they were tonal or rhythmic patterns rather than (but never entirely forgetting) what your mother did, or your boyfriend, and how you were never the same.


Morris ends his career as his company's lead dancer. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

Nevertheless, there is a big difference between the two dances. "Gloria" is a product of the Franciscanism of the post-sixties period. When the dancers pull themselves across the floor on their stomachs, they leave big perspiration stains on the linoleum. Audiences loved that; it seemed to them sincere. "V" is less sweaty and less intimate. It has the same visceral quality as "Gloria"—when Morris renounces that, he will have renounced himself—but not the same hot breath. As in "Gloria," the dancers crawl, but on all fours, not on their bellies. As in "Gloria," there is struggle—repeatedly, we are shown a beautiful but painful-looking lift, in which the man hoists the woman vertically, by her stomach. She recovers easily, however. In other words, "V"'s mind is the same as that of "Gloria," but its heart is less innocent. It is more difficult to get hold of, emotionally, as adults are harder to read than children. And, as with an adult, when it comes to you the victory is greater.

Morris's specialty is the marriage of feeling to musically based abstraction. The two new works of the season, "Cargo" and "Candleflowerdance," were in that vein. "Cargo" blended what looked like a primitive rite with Milhaud's jazzy "La Création du Monde." "Candleflowerdance" confined the dancers within a little square on the stage, where they underwent shifting emotions to Stravinsky's "Serenade in A." It would have been nice if, in honor of the anniversary, either première had been a knockout, but, as Morris has been telling us for years, life isn't always nice. Both pieces, especially "Cargo," were interesting, and, with Morris, what we are addressing at this point is not a season-to-season question—did he hit it? should we like him?—but a huge œuvre, a hundred and thirty-three dances, which each new season only enlarges and reconfigures. We don't ask for a hit every year. We're just grateful, by now, for the body of work: that the ideas of our generation produced something so serious, and that we were there to see it. ♦

ON TELEVISION

SPLITSVILLE, U.S.A.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus finds the fun in divorce.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The character that Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays in her new show, "The New Adventures of Old Christine," on CBS on Monday nights, will remind viewers of Elaine Benes, the character she played on "Seinfeld." That's a good thing for everyone. Among the most engaging sitcom characters are the ones who are both inherently annoying and constantly being put in circumstances that force them to become still more annoying, even though they're often the aggrieved parties. Ralph Kramden, Murphy Brown, the character played by Larry David in "Curb Your Enthusiasm," the foursomes of "Seinfeld" and "Will & Grace," Michael Scott, the bad boss played by Steve Carell in "The Office," based on the character that Ricky Gervais created in the immortal original—they all dig holes for themselves that they have a practically impossible time getting out of. Christine isn't as selfish or as defensive as Elaine was, though there are funny moments when she comes close—and in the bargain makes you almost forget her awful post-"Seinfeld" comedy, "Watching Ellie," which came and went a few years ago. The new title, though, is as uncatchy as the old one; in addition to not having any kind of ring to it, "The New Adventures of Old Christine" has the bugaboo word "old" in it, not to mention the fact that it calls up the Stephen King opus "Christine," whose title character was an automobile. But don't worry: this show is not an update of "My Mother the Car."

Mothers collide and compete in "The New Adventures of Old Christine."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

It's also not the best comedy around, by any means, but it may be good enough to put an end to the infamous " 'Seinfeld' curse": this could be the first show that a former "Seinfeld" cast member has done that will turn out to be anything more than a bad memory, both for the actor and for the viewers. Kari Lizer, a TV actress turned TV writer, created "Christine" with the idea of depicting a woman who has a "good divorce." Christine and her ex-husband, Richard (Clark Gregg), who have an eight-year-old son named Ritchie (shades of "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and "Happy Days"), have been split up for two years, and she declares to her brother, "My divorce is better than most people's marriages." And so it seems to be; Christine and Richard are affectionate with each other in a way that you rarely see among married sitcom couples. The first episode has Christine dropping Ritchie off on his first day at a new, private school, where she's accosted by two hypercompetitive mothers—perfect, slim, headband-wearing killer mothers, who are always seen together. They're a walking twinset. (Alex Kapp Horner and Tricia O'Kelley, who play the sock-her moms, are very good at putting small but noticeable tweaks in what are essentially clichéd roles. I hope these two turn up regularly.) They're a great foil for Louis-Dreyfus; Christine is thrown off balance by their laserlike focus on the fact that she works—she owns a gym that specializes in thirty-minute workouts for busy women—and doesn't have time to volunteer at the school. In her insecurity, she responds defensively—when the mothers tell her that they just saw her husband's girlfriend in the parking lot, she acts as if she knew all about her. Once she's out of their sight, she races out the school door, going so fast that she has trouble taking a corner and has to stick out one arm and whirl it around to get herself back on course. It's a brief, hilarious bit of physical comedy, followed instantly by another one, when her momentum causes her to almost trip again. Any number of performers could do pretty well in a scene like this; Louis-Dreyfus, as anyone who saw Elaine dance in "Seinfeld" will remember, makes such scenes excruciating miniature masterpieces of humiliation.

She's "old" Christine because, it turns out, Richard's new girlfriend is also named Christine (Emily Rutherfurd). New Christine is younger and a little on the dim side, as wife-replacements usually are in sitcoms. "Out of Practice" may be the most extreme current example of this TV truism; in that show, Henry Winkler replaces his wife, played by Stockard Channing, with the inflatable doll known as Jennifer Tilly. There is something of the "good divorce" in that show, too, though, as there is in the WB's "Reba." In sitcoms with this setup, if not in real life, it's generally the first wife who wins the battle of words—she gets custody of the zingers. But the one who always gets the sex is the ex-husband, it seems; in the second episode, Richard, noting that they've been apart for two years, says that that means Christine hasn't had sex in a little more than three years. Their divorce was mutual—each had lost interest in sleeping with the other—and yet here, as always in sitcom land, the scarlet "L," for "loser," lands right on the ex-wife's bosom. The entire second episode is about Christine getting one "under her belt," but feeling inadequate; believe it or not, she utters the lines "I used to be turned on by the touch of a man. Now I'm turned on by a sale at Target. If I can just get a guy to touch me at Target, I'm gold." It's a lame line, pulled from some old pile of sitcom dialogue. Christine is attractive, and yet all the sexual jokes are on her. "I have to stand on my head to make my boobs look good," she says. The line underscores the anxiety that women really do feel about their bodies as they get older, but in this case it's just bad-faith writing, because there is no specific truth to it, and, in fact, in outfit after outfit Louis-Dreyfus shows off her boobage as if it had just won a blue ribbon at the state fair. It's disheartening to see the show fall so lazily into sitcom conventions, such as the scene where Christine goes on a blind date that's been arranged by one of her best friends. Not only is the guy extremely unattractive, he's phobic about food: he brings his own dinner to the restaurant. The friend who set them up is played by Wanda Sykes, and you don't for a second believe that she would think of pairing Christine with this doofus.

A sitcom doesn't have to break new ground to be good, but it does have to make you feel that it isn't just going through the motions. "Christine" satisfies on that score to some extent, but you just want more from it. (And less—a lot less, for instance, of Hamish Linklater, who plays Christine's live-in slacker brother, a do-nothing drone who shuffles around in his bathrobe delivering very dead deadpan lines, and Trevor Gagnon, the oddly affectless child actor who plays Ritchie.) Some of the moments are priceless: the look on Christine's face after she sleeps with a guy (played by Andy Richter) she picked up at the grocery store, for example, and the look on her face later in the same episode, after she sleeps with him a second time, owing to a lapse in her better judgment. If there were more attention to details like this—even the subtly off-kilter angle at which Louis-Dreyfus holds her head in the second shot is telling—and less knee-jerk predictability, the series would have almost as much charm as its star does.

Listen carefully, because I'm only going to say this once, and then I'm going to deny that I ever said it: Let's hear it for network executives! It was Lloyd Braun who came up with the idea for "Lost," when he was the head of ABC's entertainment division, and it was Stephen McPherson, the current holder of that job, who suggested to Fred Goss and Nick Holly that they alter a pitch they'd made to him for an improvisational show about three families to one about a single, extended family. The result is the compelling, if not quite riveting, "Sons & Daughters," a laugh-trackless, partly improvisational comedy shown on Tuesday nights on ABC.

Goss plays Cameron Walker, a forty-something Ohioan with a complicated family life. There are a dozen regulars in the cast, and it's hard to keep track of everyone's connection with everyone else: there are full siblings, half siblings, stepparents, nieces, nephews, a great-aunt, a second wife, the father of a half sister's child, and probably a couple of goldfish floating around somewhere. It sounds wacky, but it's really like a lot of families, right down to the little girl who wears a pink tutu all the time. The cast, which includes Dee Wallace and Max Gail, as Cameron's parents, and Greg Pitts, who, unforgettably, played the guy who made the lewd "Oh face" in the movie "Office Space," is uniformly wonderful. More than ten hours of tape is shot for each episode, and somehow Holly and Goss shape the weekly footage into a coherent half hour. In the absence of a laugh track, you can clearly hear and feel the vexations and pain behind the humor. When Cameron's sister Sharon (Alison Quinn), who is depressed about her sexless marriage, says, "I'm pretty in Cincinnati. I'm not pretty in a general sense," the joke isn't merely situational—it's existential. ♦

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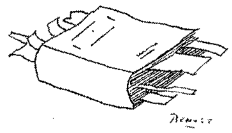

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

SOUL MATES

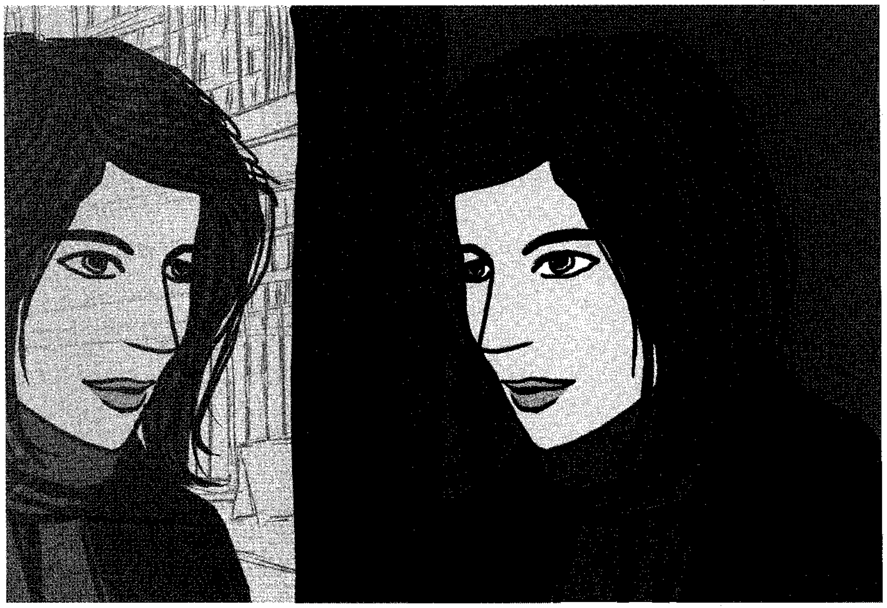
"The Double Life of Véronique," "Lucky Number Slevin."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Do movies grow old? They may physically fade, as the film stock decays; they may look dated, as the trappings, or the actorly mannerisms, of a former age become more glaring; but what of the feelings that they generate, or the gestures that they sought to enshrine? These questions crowded in as I watched "The Double Life of Véronique," a film that held me in a discomforting trance when I saw it, and resaw it, on its first appearance, in 1991. Now it is back, as part of the Krzysztof Kieślowski season at Lincoln Center, running from April 5th through April 23rd. The retrospective includes early shorts and rare documentaries, and all Kieślowski fans will have their touchstones; some will bow before his noble "Three Colors" trilogy, completed two years before his death, in 1996, while purists will insist on the supremacy of the "Decalogue," a series of films rooted in the Ten Commandments. Novices, however, might care to begin with mid-career puzzlers such as "No End" or "Blind Chance," or, better still, to dive into "Véronique."

The film stars Irène Jacob, first as Veronika, a student in Kraków, and then as Véronique, a music teacher in the French city of Clermont-Ferrand. The women are unrelated and unknown to one another, but they are identical, and, at one miraculous instant, they are separated by a matter of yards. In short, they are soul mates. You can only hope to film such a subject if you believe in the existence of the soul, but Kieślowski goes one better: he acts as the flight controller of the soul. Poor, enraptured Veronika, singing onstage with an orchestra, expires in the middle of a phrase—literally dying for her art—and the camera passes serenely over the heads of the audience, charting her departure from this life. We even get a shot from within her grave, watching and hearing the earth being tossed down by mourners; it is a fright worthy of Poe, although he might have fainted at what follows—a straight cut to the living Véronique, nearing orgasm in the arms of a lover. The great death has led to a little one, and from here on she will be haunted (though more consoled than spooked) by her other half.

Fans of the director praise his metaphysical powers, but that claim, in any filmmaker, is to be approached with caution. The sole reason that Kieślowski, like Bergman, has earned the right to offer us glances into the beyond is that his grip on the here and now is so unerring; witness Veronika's scraping of dead leaves along the top of a wall, the splash of her shoes in a sun-flashing puddle, the trailing end of Véronique's scarf in a hospital corridor, and the closing shot of her palm on the bark—the reliable roughness—of a tree. As you watch the golden flutter of light that darts around Véronique's room, you might reasonably wonder if Kieślowski was schooled in metempsychosis, or spiritual transmigration, but you could also ask whether, as a boy, he had listened to tales of Tinkerbell. The film is filled to dazzling with the vitreous and the translucent; the flaw running down the window of a Polish train seems, in some mystifying way, as momentous as a rift in spacetime. We see through a glass darkly, and often confusingly, but at least we see.



Mirror images: Veronika and Véronique, Kieślowski's two heroines.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

So has this vision worn well? It seems more politically suffused; fifteen years ago, I was too dumbfounded, or too plain dumb, to realize that the very idea of the movie's transit between Western and Eastern Europe was a declaration of newly acquired liberty. There is a clue in a postmark on an envelope that Véronique inspects with a magnifying glass: "1990," it reads, the year in which the Communist Party of Poland was finally dissolved. The bodies of its citizens, as well as the souls of its singers, were henceforth free to travel where they desired. Could it be that our two, mirrored heroines were the product of a divided continent, and that, with the melting of borders, only one of them was now required?

Then, there is Irène Jacob. Time has not weakened my worship, but I did start to question, this time round, how skilled an actress she actually was. The picture is unthinkable without her presence—swaying between the jubilant and the fretful, all wide eyes and corrugated brow. It is as if she lacked a layer of skin, and that rawness verges on the embarrassing; she comes across not as a decided character but as somebody to whom things happen—a perfect alabaster form, still taking blows from the sculptor's chisel. When Véronique sits with her young pupils, watching a puppet show, she responds with the same ecstatic naïveté as they do. She is frequently naked, but her face, in arousal, could be that of a saint, lost in religious contemplation, and her bare breast is also the clothed breast that she instinctively cups, mid-song, as if striving to hold her heart in. Kieślowski was brilliant with children and with the elderly, who, lacking the strength for defiance, tend to submit to the imprint of fate; could decades of totalitarian rule have attuned him almost too well to the spectacle of human beings being jerked around by the puppeteers of the state? Where are the robust resisters of middle age?

Near the start of the film, Veronika turns to her father with a plea: "What do I really want, Papa?" To Western ears, especially those of American youth, that will sound comically passive, yet we live with such a plethora of wants, with such high expectations that they will be met, and with such a barrage of complaints if they are not, that to find a director filing reports from a world of uncertainty has a strangely tonic effect. The two leads in "The Double Life of Véronique" may annoy us, but whatever it is they suffer from—loneliness, diminished civil rights, an impoverishment of the will—has forced them to clutch at those scraps of bliss which life can unexpectedly let fall. If you wish to prime yourself for two and a half weeks at Lincoln Center, try consulting Kieślowski's fellow-Poles: not just filmmakers but poets, too, so many of them expert in that wry delight. All of Veronika, and Véronique, is prefigured in these lines of Czeslaw Milosz:

> O my love, where are they, where are
> they going
> The flash of a hand, streak of
> movement, rustle of pebbles.
> I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

Homegrown movies, at present, seem unworthy of their cast lists. I keep seeing films in which A-grade actors fill not just the top slots but some of the lesser roles, too, only to find themselves squashed by a script, or by a weight of contrivance, that would be lucky to bring home a C-plus. Even among this year's Oscar contenders, you could hear the creak of shelves being overstocked; as Jon Stewart said to his audience, it would be much easier if anyone who *wasn't* in "Crash" put a hand up.

And so to Paul McGuigan's "Lucky Number Slevin," at the end of which you sit back, comb the loose strands of plot from your hair, and ask, Why did Morgan Freeman, Ben Kingsley, Bruce Willis, Stanley Tucci, and Danny Aiello sign up for this? Maybe they were so affected by the Chekhovian grace of the script, in which party No. 1 is forever trying to put the screws on party No. 2, that they felt morally compelled to render their services. Or maybe they all yearned to play second fiddle, knowing that the first fiddle belonged to Josh Hartnett. He stars as Slevin, who finds himself mistaken, with mixed results, for the friend whose apartment he has borrowed. On the one hand, he gets to bed down with the neighbor across the hall (Lucy Liu, the sparkiest presence in the film). On the other hand, portions of Slevin are repeatedly tenderized by the black henchmen of the Boss (Morgan Freeman), who are slow and daft, or by the Jewish henchmen of the Rabbi (Ben Kingsley), who are low and cunning. How McGuigan and his screenwriter, Jason Smilovic, found time for such extensive racial finesse, when there are so many story lines to handle, I have no idea.

To be fair, the failure of "Lucky Number Slevin" is less surprising when you consider that the mini-genre at which it aims—that of the tangled comic thriller, or Noir with the Lights Turned On—is one of the most intractable of all. We know of this ambition because, in one scene, the Rabbi pointedly asks Slevin whether he has ever seen "North by Northwest." He even offers a précis of the plot (another frolic through confused identities), which serves merely to remind us of the chasm that yawns between Hitchcock and the likes of Paul McGuigan. The former was all suavity, as if the sight of Cary Grant's tailoring—not to mention Cary Grant—were a calmative in itself, whereas "Lucky Number Slevin" is a bag of nerves. Everything here is too much. The older the actors, the saltier the ham of their performances, and they are backed up by a squirming nastiness in the violence, twists that make trouble but no sense, and soft-centered attempts at hardboiled figures of speech. In the matter of a minor character named Max, for instance, we learn that he "woke up to find that his dreams had been just the stuff of pipes." So much for a resurgence of film noir. I woke up from this movie to find that my hopes had just gone down the hole of plug. ♦

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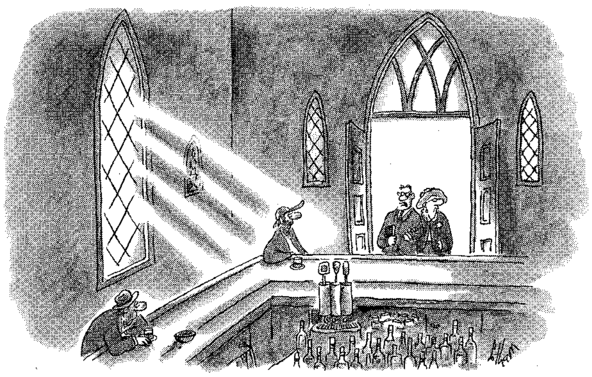
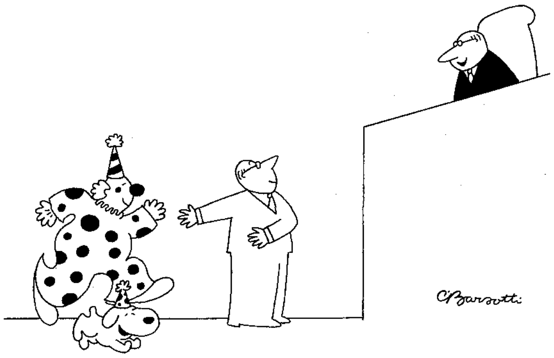
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, April 9th. Finalists in the March 27th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 24th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Finally—a faith-based initiative I can embrace."
Michael Kraatz, Canaan, N.H.



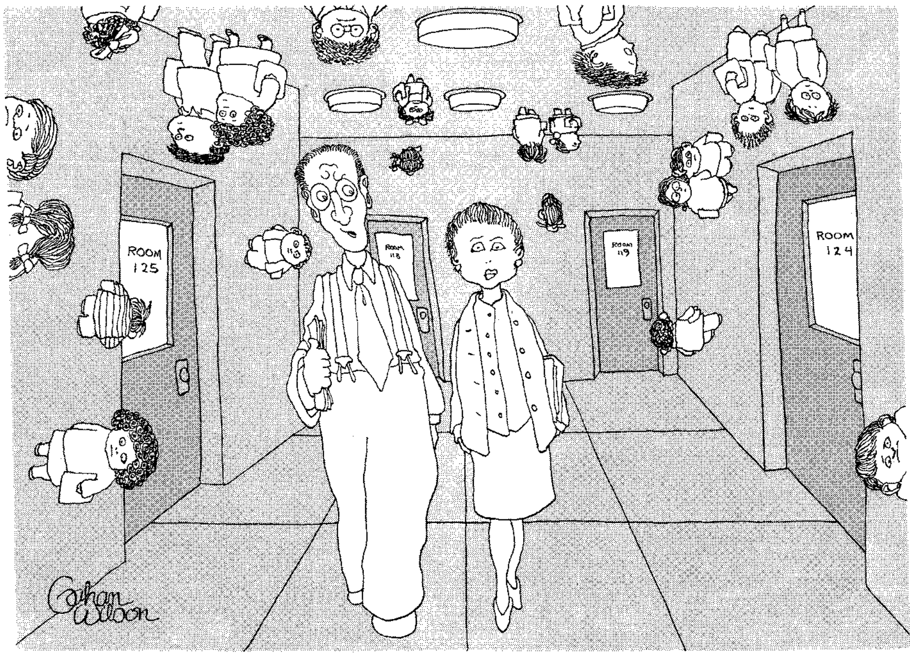
THE FINALISTS

"I don't know about you, counsellor, but I kind of wish there were more murders at the circus."
Laurie Wood, Minneapolis, Minn.

"How many surprise witnesses do you have in that little car?"
John Sonntag, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

"Ooh . . . I'm going to allow this!"
Tim Harrod, Brooklyn, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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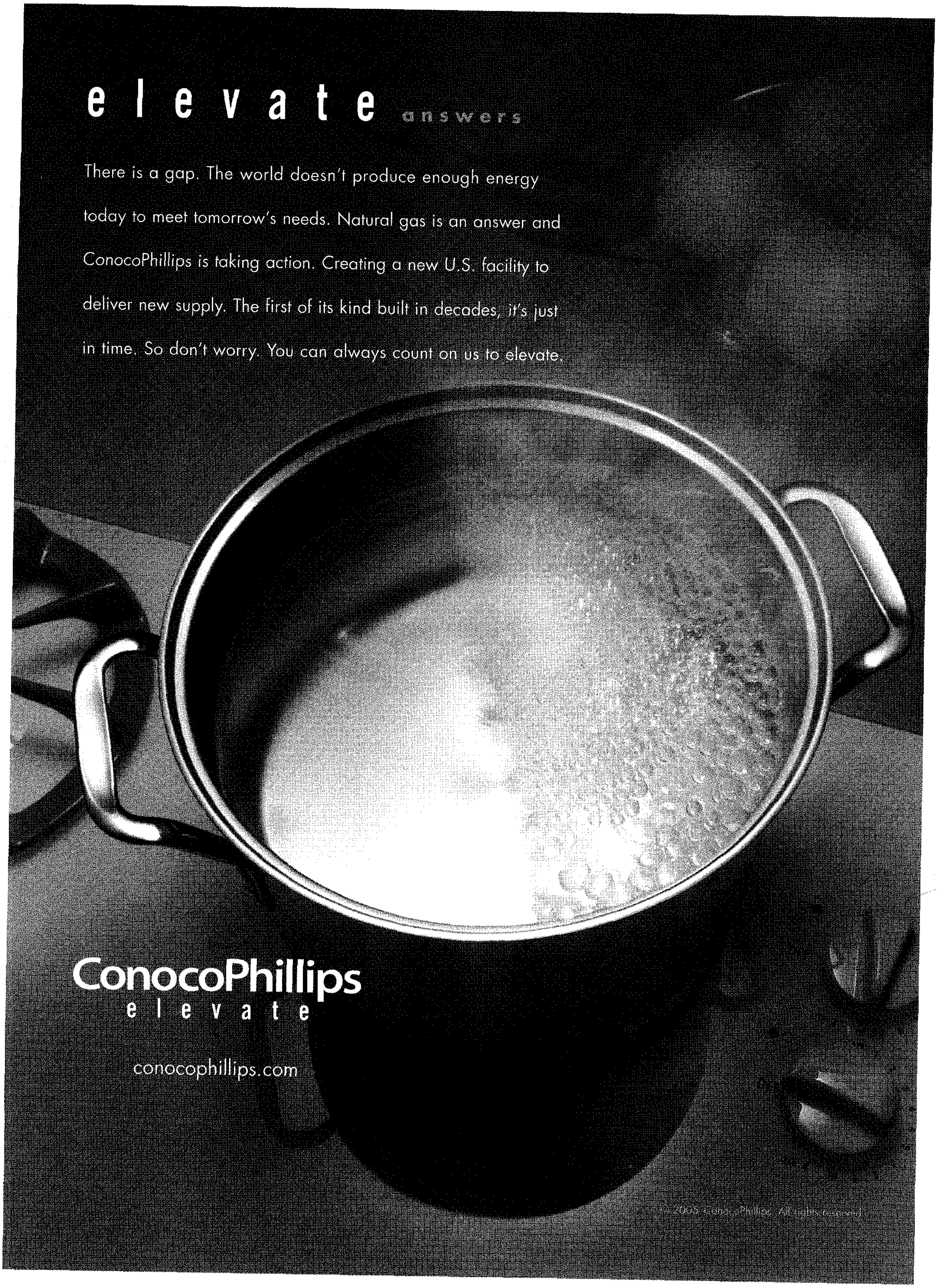

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